

Tracking the Salt Front

The lower portion of the Hudson River is an **estuary**. Here **fresh water** flowing down the river meets **salt water** pushing in from the Atlantic Ocean. The leading edge of ocean water entering the estuary is called the **salt front**.

After heavy rains, lots of fresh water runs into the Hudson. It presses against the salty **seawater**, moving the salt front south down the river and closer to the ocean. In periods of dry weather, less fresh water enters the estuary. Ocean water pushes further north up the Hudson, moving the salt front inland.

Scientists track the salt front using **Hudson River Miles**, abbreviated HRM. Hudson River Miles start at the southern tip of Manhattan in New York City. This spot, called The Battery, is HRM 0. The George Washington Bridge is at HRM 12, the city of Kingston at HRM 91. Ocean tides reach the Federal Dam in Troy at HRM 153.

Using the graph "Hudson River Salt Front: Average Location by Month" and the map of Hudson River Miles, answer the questions below.

1. (a) In what month is the salt front closest to New York City? _____

(b) In that month, where is the salt front located in Hudson River Miles?

Hudson River Mile _____

(c) On your Hudson River Miles map, mark this location with the numeral 1.

What is the nearest town? _____

2. (a) In what month is the salt front furthest north up the Hudson? _____

(b) In that month, where is it located in Hudson River Miles?

Hudson River Mile _____

On your Hudson River Miles map, mark this location with the numeral 2.

(c) What two towns are closest to it? _____

3. On your Hudson River Miles map, what is the distance between the salt front's location at numeral 1 and its location at numeral 2? _____ miles

The graph you just studied gives the average location of the salt front in each month. However, the salt front can move many miles over several weeks—even in a single day—depending on weather. Use the graph **Hudson River Salt Front Location: June 20 to July 10, 2006** to answer the questions below.

4. (a) Where was the salt front located (in Hudson River Miles) on June 26?

Hudson River Mile _____

Mark this spot on your Hudson River Miles map and label it June 26.

(b) Where was it on July 2?

Hudson River Mile _____

Mark this spot on your Hudson River Miles map and label it July 2.

(c) How many miles apart are these two locations? _____ miles

5. What do you think caused the salt front to move down the river between June 26 and July 2? Support your answer with evidence from the text above.

6. (a) During the period shown by this graph, when did the salt front make its biggest move from one day to the next? _____

(b) How far did it move? _____ miles

(c) Did it move **upriver** (north) or **downriver** (south)? _____

Salt Front Math

*Heavy rains in the Hudson's watershed may cause **floods** along streams that flow into the estuary. How might these rains affect the salt front?*



In the Hudson River estuary, fresh water flowing from the Hudson's watershed meets seawater pushing in from the Atlantic Ocean. The fresh water **dilutes** the incoming salt water, but scientists can detect the leading edge of this ocean water—the salt front.

The salt front moves up and down the Hudson depending on how much fresh water is flowing off the watershed. This usually means that the salt front is closest to the ocean in spring, when there's lots of rain and snow is melting. The front moves upriver in the drier weather of summer and early fall. However, extreme weather events—major storms, for example—can upset this pattern.

This worksheet explores how weather and other factors control the salt front's location. Use the Hudson River Miles map to help answer the questions.

Example: On March 28, 2005, the salt front was at Hudson River Mile (HRM) 62. On your Hudson River Miles map, this is near Newburgh. A heavy rain began that day and lasted overnight. Three days later the salt front was at HRM 31. How many miles did the front move? Did it move downriver towards the ocean or upriver towards the dam at Troy?

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{HRM } 62 \\
 - \text{HRM } 31 \\
 \hline
 31 \text{ miles downriver towards the ocean}
 \end{array}$$

1. Spring 2002 was rainy. In early June, the salt front was at HRM 32. Then the rain stopped, and the weather stayed dry into fall. By September 10, 2002, the salt front had pushed north 49 miles.

(a) What was the Hudson River Mile location of the front on September 10?
HRM _____

(b) On September 10, the salt front was closest to which town on your Hudson River Miles map?

2. On December 5, 2003, a foot of snow fell on the Hudson Valley. Five days later, a big rain storm hit the valley. As the rain began, the salt front was at HRM 62. The rain melted the snow, sending lots of fresh water into the Hudson. By December 13, the salt front was at HRM 40.

(a) How many miles did the salt front move because of the rain? _____ miles

(b) Did the salt front move downriver (south) towards the ocean or upriver (north) towards the dam at Troy? _____

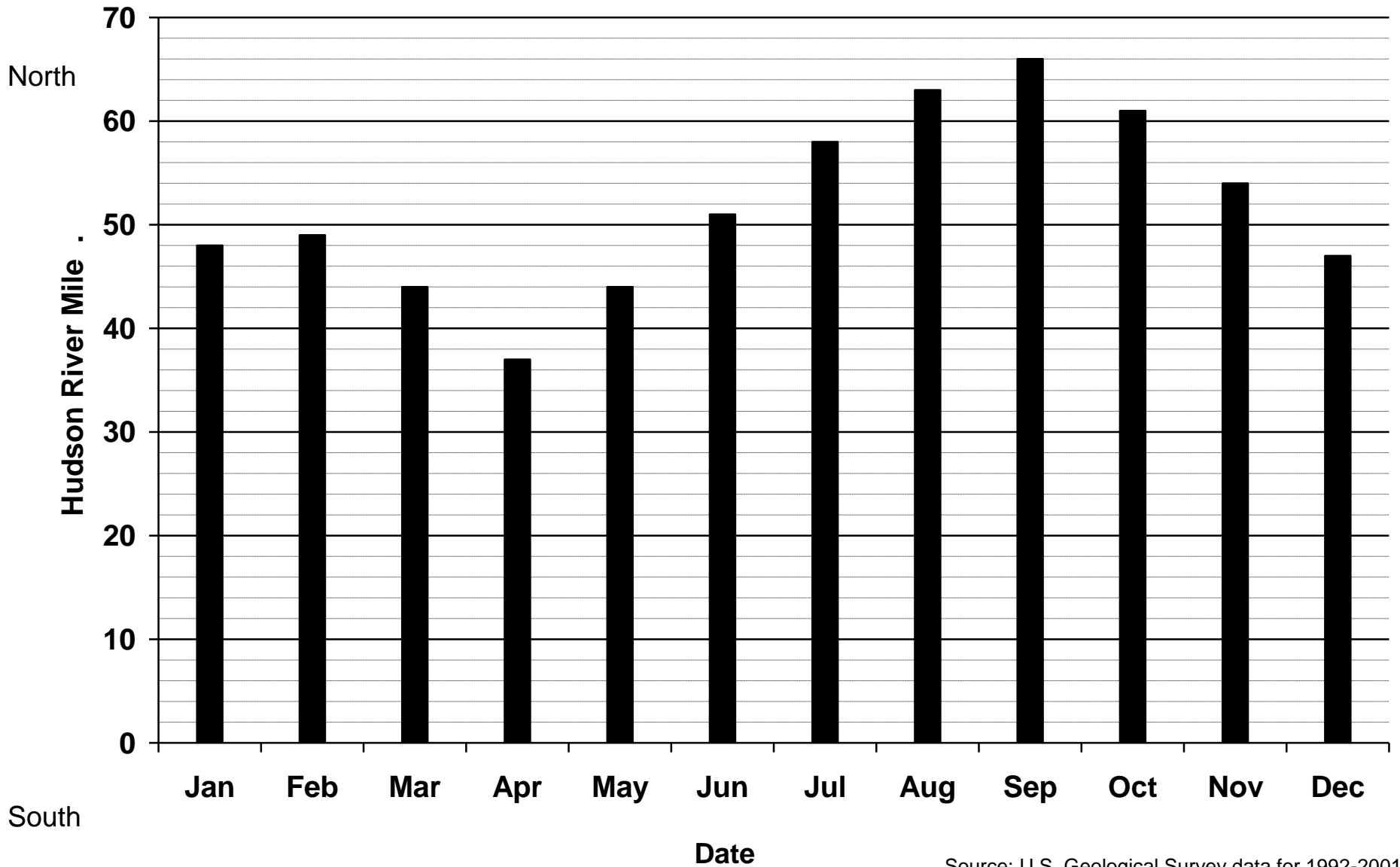
3. Native Americans called the Hudson "The River That Flows Both Ways." About every six hours, **tides** make the river **current** reverse direction. This affects the salt front. On January 8, 2005, at 12:00 noon the salt front was near West Point at HRM 52. At 6:00 PM, the front was near the Bear Mountain Bridge at HRM 47. How many miles did the salt front move between 12:00 noon and 6:00 pm? _____ miles

Challenge questions:

At which time - 12:00 noon or 6:00 PM - was the tide high? At which time was it low?

Later on, at midnight, would the salt front be closer to West Point or the Bear Mountain Bridge? Why?

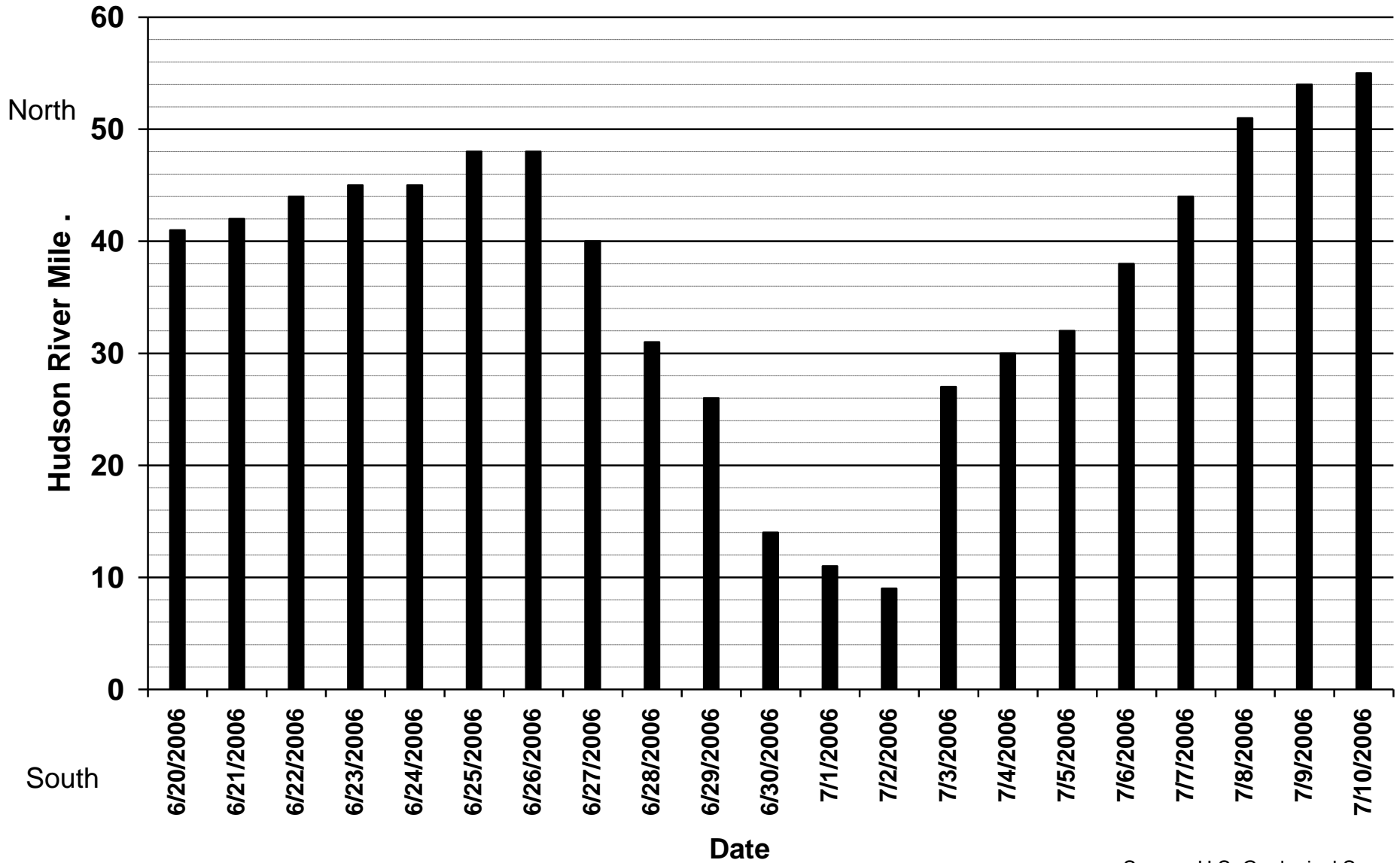
Hudson River Salt Front: Average Location by Month



Source: U.S. Geological Survey data for 1992-2001



Hudson River Salt Front Location: June 20 - July 10, 2006



Source: U.S. Geological Survey

