

Professor Agassiz gives the following general account of the Keys and Reefs (see also map):—

“The Keys consist of an extensive range of low islands, rising but a few feet, perhaps from six to eight or ten, or at the utmost to twelve or thirteen feet, above the level of the sea. They begin to the north of Cape Florida, when they converge toward the main land, extending in the form of a flat crescent in a south-westerly direction, gradually receding from the mainland until, opposite Cape Sable, they have so far retreated as to be separated from it by a shallow sheet of water forty miles wide. Further to the west they project in a more westerly course, with occasional interruptions, as far as the Tortugas [in longitude 83° W.], which form the most western group. They consist either of accumulated dead corals, of coral rocks, or of coral sand, cemented together with more or less compactness. Their form varies, but is usually elongated and narrow, their greatest longitudinal extent following the direction of the main range, except in the group of the Pine Islands, where their course is almost at right angles with the main range—a circumstance which we shall hereafter attempt to explain.

“Most of these islands are small, the largest of them, such as Key West, and Key Largo, not exceeding ten or fifteen miles in length; others only two or three, and many scarcely a mile. Their width varies from a quarter to a third or half a mile, the largest barely measuring a mile across; but whatever the difference in their size, they all agree in one respect—that their steepest shore is turned toward the Gulf Stream, while their more gradual slope inclines toward the mud flats which they incircle.

“This is a point which it is important to notice, as it will assist us in the comparison between the Keys and the shore bluffs of the mainland, as well as with the outer reef and reefs of other seas, in all of which we find that the seaward shore is steeper than that turned toward the mainland, or, in case of circular reefs inclosing basins (atolls), than that which borders the lagoon.