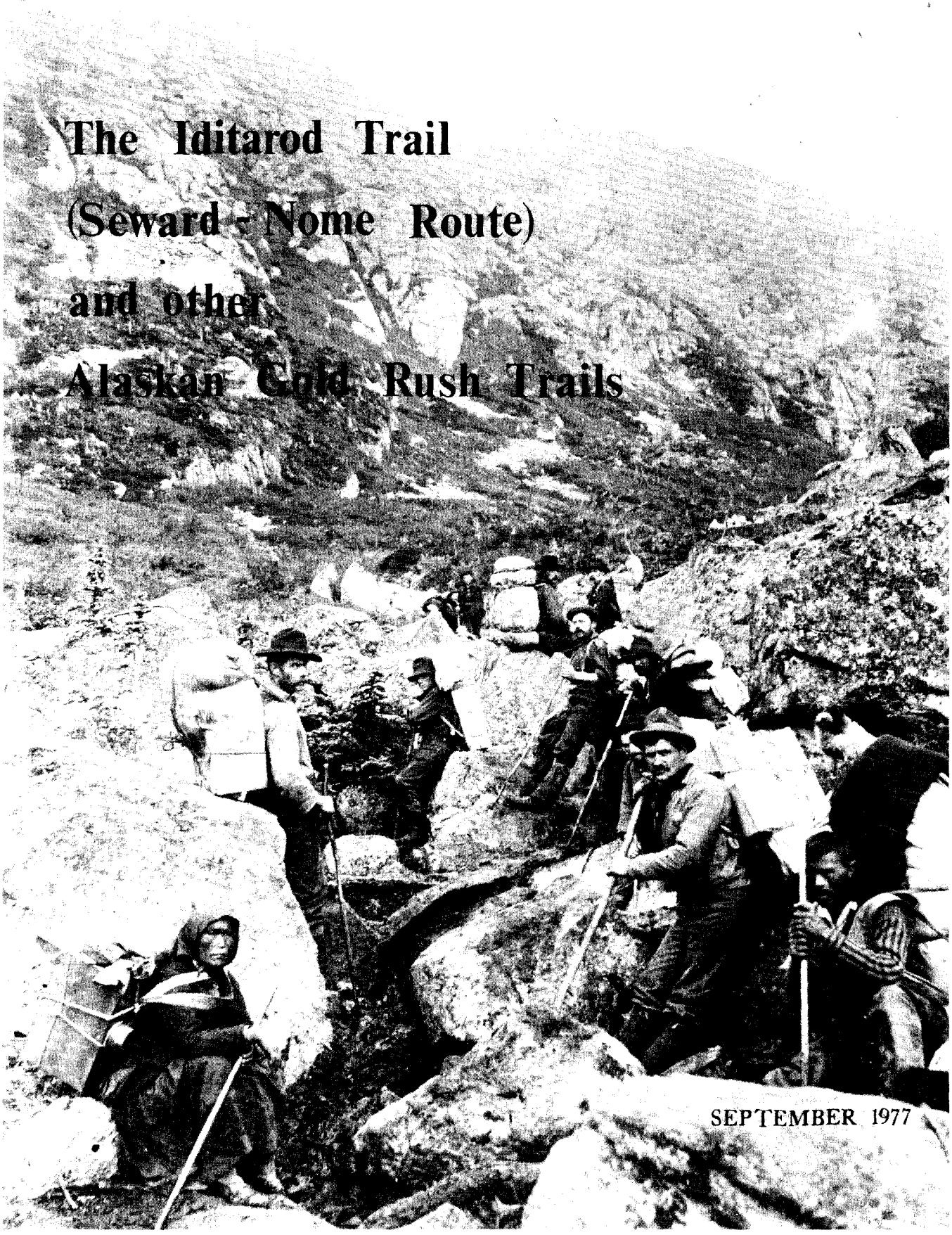
The Iditarod Trail
(Seward - Nome Route)
and other
Alaskan Gold Rush Trails



SEPTEMBER 1977

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U. S. administration.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Cecil D. Andrus, Secretary

Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
Chris Therral Delaporte, Director

THE IDITAROD TRAIL
(SEWARD-NOME ROUTE)

AND OTHER
ALASKAN GOLD RUSH TRAILS

Prepared by
Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
Department of the Interior
Under the Authority
of the National Trails System Act.

September 1977

Cover: *Stampeders and Chilkoot Packers on the Chilkoot Trail during summer of 1897 (La Roche Collection, Library of Congress).*

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INTRODUCTION

The National Trails System Act, Public Law 90-543, was approved on October 2, 1968. This Act states:

> In order to provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population and in order to promote public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas of the Nation, trails should be established (i) primarily, near the urban areas of the Nation, and (ii) secondarily, within established scenic areas more remotely located.

The Act instituted a national system of recreation and scenic trails; designated the Appalachian and Pacific Crest Trails as the initial components of the National Scenic Trail System; and prescribed methods by which, and standards according to which additional components may be added to the system.

The Act directed that 14 specified routes would be studied for the purpose of determining the possibility and desirability of designating each as a national scenic trail. One route named for study was the Gold Rush Trails in Alaska. No further identification of the route was included in the Act. The initial task was, therefore, to determine which specific trails should be studied as the basis of appropriate proposals for additional national scenic trails to be submitted to the President and to the Congress.

An analysis of the legislative history revealed that five gold rush trails were mentioned for consideration in the legislative record of the National Trails System Act. They were: (1) the Chilkoot Trail, extending from Dyea over Chilkoot Pass to the Canadian border; (2) the White Pass Trail, from Skagway to the Canadian border; (3) the Dalton Trail, beginning at Haines and extending along the Chilkat River to the Canadian border; (4) the Valdez Trail, extending from Valdez to Fairbanks; and (5) the Iditarod Trail, originating in Knik and crossing the Alaska Range to Iditarod City. At the end of this list was the additional phrase ". . . and other such Gold Rush Trails in Alaska." It was concluded that the five named routes would be evaluated as well as any other important historic routes related to the Gold Rush Era.

An Alaska Gold Rush Trail Study team was formed in September 1973. It was chaired by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and had representatives from the following agencies:

Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation
Alaska State Department of Highways
Alaska State Department of Fish and Game

Alaska State Division of Parks
Alaska State Historical Commission
Alaska Bi-Centennial Commission
Bureau of Land Management
National Park Service
Fish and Wildlife Service
Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission
U. S. Forest Service
Office of the Governor, Division of Policy
Development and Planning

The tasks undertaken by the study team were: (1) determine any routes, in addition to those named in the legislative record, believed to have high potential for public enjoyment related to the history of the Gold Rush Era; (2) make a preliminary analysis of the trails named in the legislative record and other trails identified under task (1) to determine which route segments have high potential for public recreation enjoyment by virtue of visible historic remnants, presence of historic sites, high scenic quality, freedom from intrusion, length, accessibility, and other factors; and (3) conduct a detailed study of trails which appear to merit in-depth evaluation in accordance with Section 5(b) of the National Trails System Act.

TRAILS ANALYZED

From the legislative history, the five previously described trails were analyzed. The Iditarod Trail, for analytical purposes, was considered as extending from Seward to Nome, with a spur to Iditarod.

To the original list of five trails were added the Koyukuk-Chandalar Routes, also known as the Fairbanks-Wiseman Trail, and the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS), also referred to as the Valdez-Eagle-Big Delta Telegraph Line.

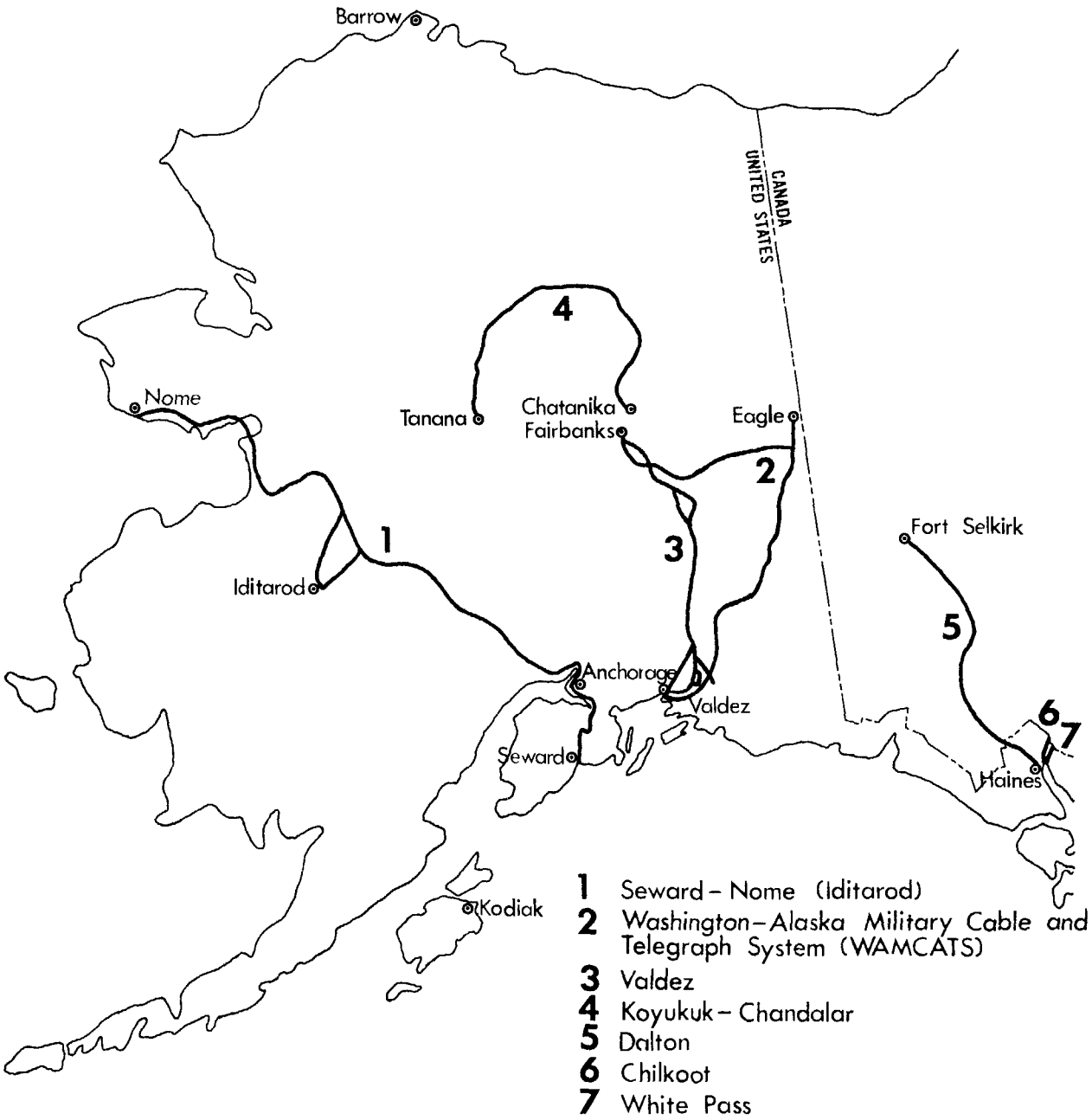
Other trails, such as the Katmai Trails and the White River Trail across Skolai Pass, were considered, but the study team concluded that these lesser gold rush routes did not warrant analysis at this time. It was also determined that major water-based routes, such as the Yukon River, would not be analyzed.

TRAILS MERITING IN-DEPTH STUDY

Of the seven gold rush trails or routes analyzed, four were considered to be of special significance and meriting detailed study and evaluation for possible inclusion in the National Trails System. These were the Iditarod, WAMCATS, Chilkoot, and White Pass Trails. The Iditarod and WAMCATS Trails received detailed evaluation as a part of this study. The Chilkoot and White Pass Trails had been the subject of intensive evaluation by the National Park Service in connection

GOLD RUSH TRAIL SEGMENTS

Evaluated During Study



with recent studies of the then proposed Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park and further study was considered unnecessary.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study team found important historical and recreational values associated with each of the Alaska Gold Rush study routes. The Seward-Nome (Iditarod) route is proposed for designation as a National Historic Trail and inclusion in the National Trails System. Legislation to amend the National Trails System Act to include the new National Historic Trail category has been proposed.

None of the other trails or routes are recommended for inclusion in the National System at this time.

The Seward-Nome route is composed of a number of trails and side trails developed at different times during the Gold Rush Era. The Iditarod strike began in 1908; it was the last of the major Alaskan strikes and prompted the Alaska Road Commission to improve the Rainy Pass-Kaltag section of the Seward to Nome trail. Because the Iditarod mining district was the most common destination of travelers in this last phase of the Gold Rush Era, the name Iditarod Trail has become a term of convenience to describe the many geographic and historic segments of the Seward to Nome trail. These trails, aggregating 2,037 miles, offer a rich diversity of climate, terrain, scenery, wildlife, recreation, and historic resources in an environment largely unchanged since the days of the stampeders. It is the isolated, primitive quality of this historical environment that makes the Iditarod National Historic Trail proposal unique. No where in the National Trails System is there such an extensive landscape, so demanding of durability and skill during its winter season of travel. On the Iditarod, today's adventurer can duplicate the experience and challenge of yesteryear.

Though comprehensive studies of historic resources remain to be done, preliminary surveys have indicated that the Iditarod Trail possesses national historical significance. Rapid erosion of known historic resources, and impending threats to the primitive quality of the trail, are immediate concerns. Should the Congress act favorably on the Iditarod Trail proposal, comprehensive studies and management programs would be initiated to preserve the trail's historic environment and resources.

The Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) played an important role in the Gold Rush Era. Portions of the route have been paralleled or overlain by highways. One section of 95 miles between Unalakleet and Kaltag was analyzed as part of the Iditarod Trail. Approximately 376 miles of the line between Eagle and Slana and between Kechumstuk and the Big Delta area offer a wide variety of historic interest and recreation opportunity. The findings, however, are that while possessing significant values, a National Scenic or National Historic Trail designation is not warranted as it was primarily a telegraph line rather than a trail and since it does not have the desired nationwide attraction.

The Valdez Trail has been replaced by highways. Roadside interpretation of its historical aspects is needed at some locations. However, this should properly be a State/local responsibility.

The Koyukuk-Chandalar routes were found not to have been of national significance and do not possess high potential for recreation use or development. In addition, a segment of the route in the Wiseman area is overlain or paralleled by a highway and a pipeline.

The Dalton Trail does not meet the guidelines established for National Scenic Trails. The portion in the United States is paralleled by a road for its entire length and logging roads and mining activities in the area have disrupted major segments of the historic route. It does offer opportunities for short day hikes and interpretation, but this should be a State/local consideration.

The Chilkoot and White Pass Trails are of national significance, but not of sufficient length to be considered for designation as National Scenic Trails. They likely would meet the criteria for designation as National Historic Trails, should the National Trails System Act be amended to include that category. In the meantime, their protection and use for public purposes is assured as a result of the recent authorization of a Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park which encompasses the United States portions of the two trails.

The Alaska Gold Rush

THE ALASKA GOLD RUSH

The great Klondike gold strike was not the first gold discovery in the far north, nor were the thousands that poured into Alaska and the Yukon in 1898 the first stampeders into the country.

Discoveries of small amounts of gold were reported as early as the 1830's by Russian explorers and fur traders. In their search for furs and Native trade markets, Russians traveled along Alaska's coast and up several major rivers. The gold found along the Kuskokwim, the Yukon, in the Cook Inlet area, and in southeast Alaska, and perhaps other places during the Russian rule of Alaska, appeared to be of only casual interest to the discoverers. These finds caused no stampedes and apparently did not distract the Russians from their primary bonanza, furs.

In the 1860's, Russian influence and activities in Alaska waned, culminating in the sale of "Seward's Icebox" to the United States in 1867. However, even prior to the sale of Alaska, Americans had begun drifting north. After the California Gold Rush of 1849, many prospectors continued the search for gold up through British Columbia. In 1861, gold was discovered in the Stikine River country of British Columbia. In 1862, Reverend Robert McDonald reported finding gold in the Yukon drainage near the present town of Circle. The site of this discovery was never relocated. In 1865, traces of gold were discovered by Daniel Libbey in the Nome area.

In 1871, gold was discovered in northern British Columbia and at Sitka in southeast Alaska. These strikes attracted several hundred men, but it was not until 1880 that the first major gold strike in Alaska was made. Richard Harris and Joseph Juneau found lode deposits of gold in southeast Alaska near the town named after the latter man. A year later, the famous Treadwell mine was in operation and large-scale production was underway.

The prospecting moved northward into the Yukon Territory and in the early 1880's, gold was found in the Pelly and Stewart Rivers--the first strike in the Yukon drainage. The first stampede into the Yukon River country involved about 200 would-be miners along the Stewart River in 1885-86. Most were already living or prospecting in the region.

The increased activity in the Upper Yukon drainage immediately sparked further discoveries. The first gold discovery in the U. S. portion of the Yukon drainage occurred in 1886 by Howard Franklin on a tributary of the Fortymile River bearing his name. A rush of prospectors to the region ensued and further discoveries were made in the Fortymile district.

Prospectors were also exploring other regions of Alaska at the time. Gold was reported at Tramway Bar in the upper Koyukuk River drainage as early as 1887. The following year, reports of gold came from the

Nome area on the Seward Peninsula and from the Kenai Peninsula along Cook Inlet. In the early 1890's, gold was also found in the Valdez area. These strikes attracted only local interest and no stampedes resulted.

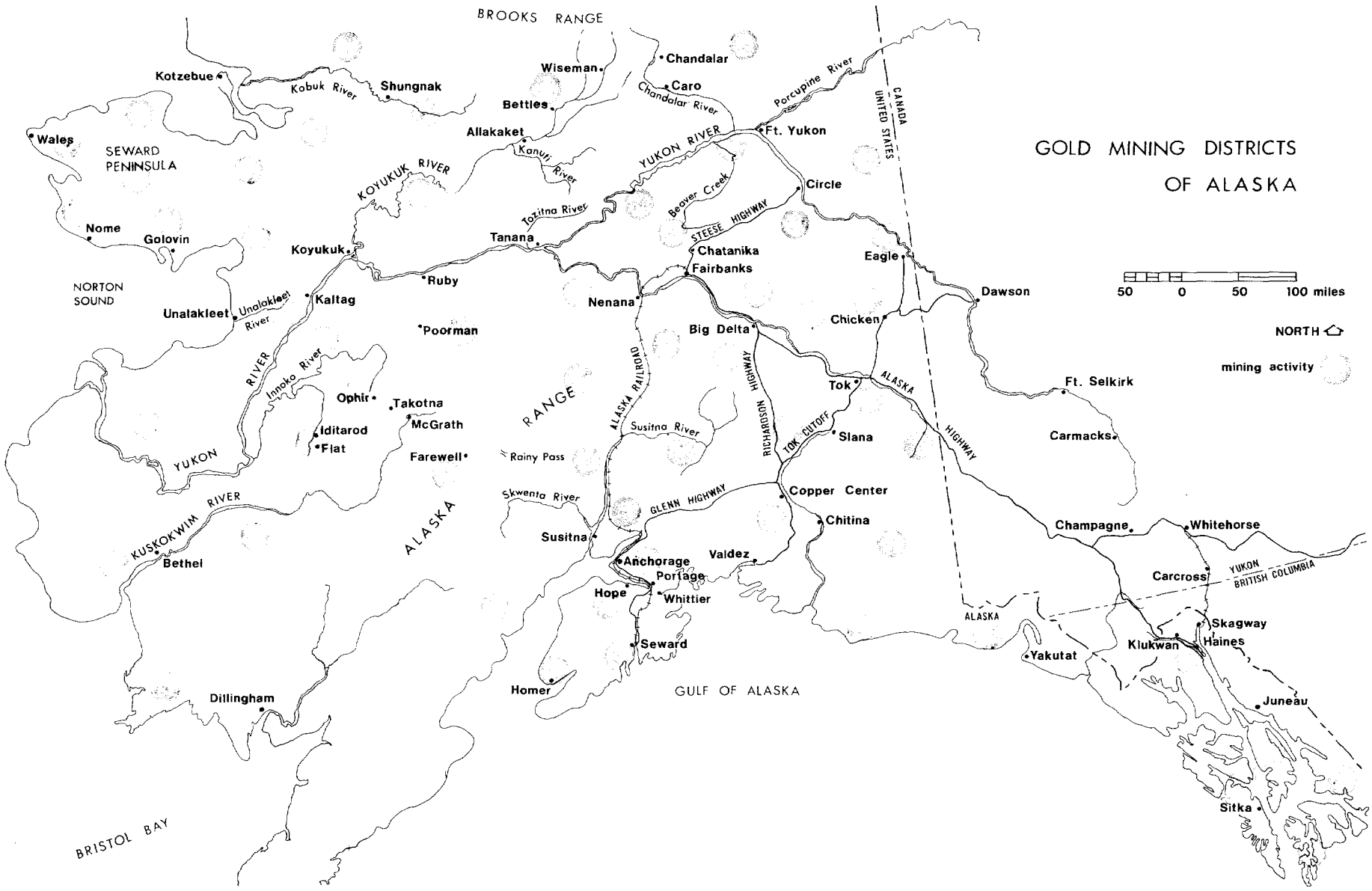
The second major stampede in the United States portion of the Yukon drainage began in 1893. Hundreds of men moved down the Yukon River from diggings along upstream tributaries to the boom town of Circle, located about 165 miles downriver from the United States-Canada border. During the rush of people upriver to the Circle district discoveries, gold was found in the Rampart area. Discoveries of gold on the Kenai Peninsula in 1896 finally attracted attention from outside the region. During that summer, an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 persons steamed into Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound, drawn by reports of gold on the Kenai Peninsula.

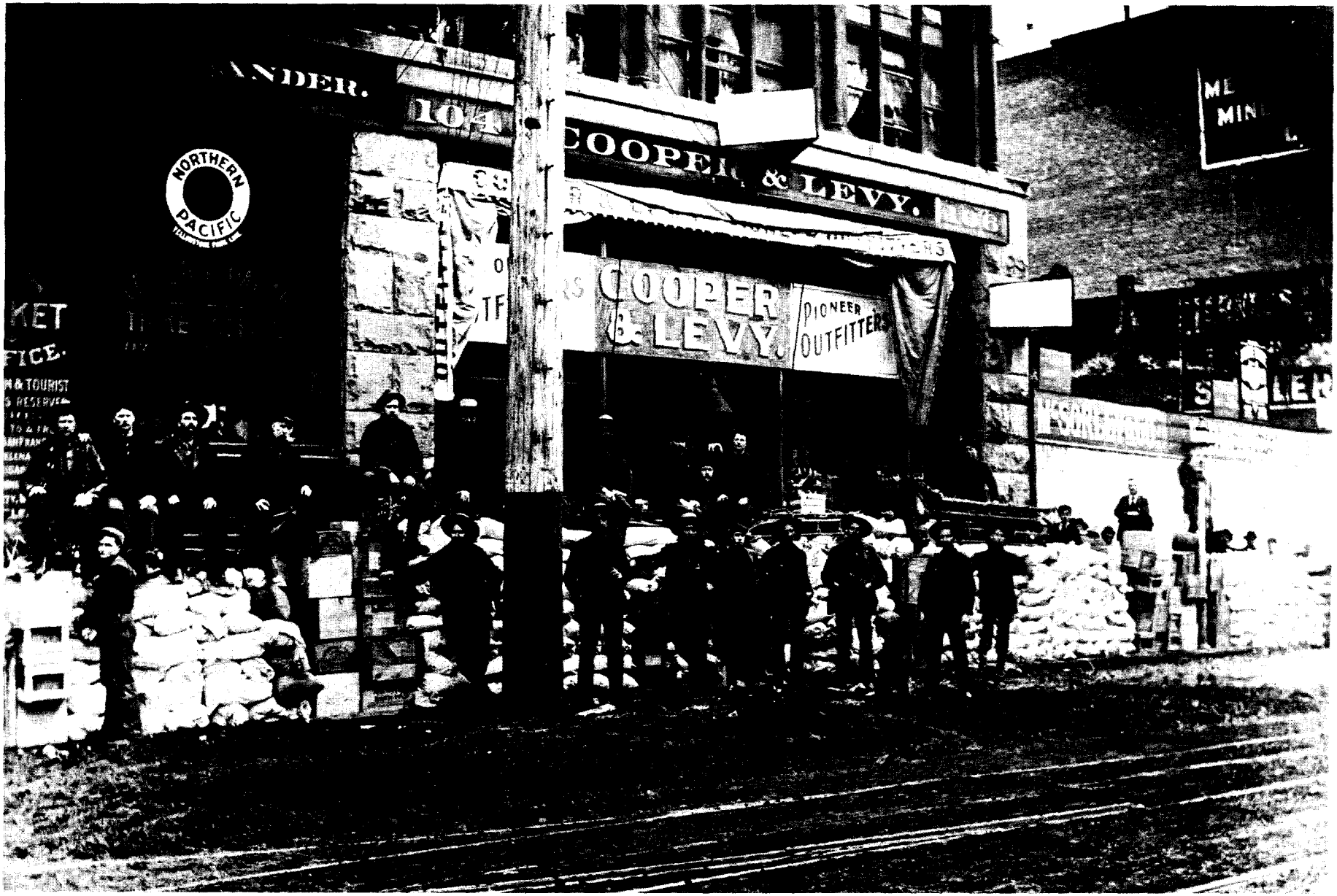
On August 14, 1896, Skookum Jim, Tagish Charley, and George Carmack made one of the largest placer gold strikes in history on a small tributary of the Klondike River in the Yukon Territory. In the next few months, many of the estimated 1,700 white men in the Yukon basin, of which 1,000 were in Alaska, rushed to the new strike and staked claims. Boom towns of previous strikes, such as Circle and Fortymile, were nearly deserted as men stampeded back up the Yukon to the Klondike.

Ships carrying gold from the Klondike arrived in San Francisco and Seattle during July of 1897 and the rush was on. During the fall and winter of 1897 and the spring and summer of 1898, an estimated 60,000 persons headed for the Klondike. Approximately 28,000 landed at Skagway or Dyea in southeast Alaska to attempt either the Chilkoot or White Pass Trails to the Yukon River and then travel down the river to the boom town of Dawson. Another 5,000 landed at Wrangell in southeast Alaska to go up the Stikine River route to the Yukon. Approximately 5,000 to 6,000 took steamers up 1,200 miles of the Yukon River from St. Michaels on the Bering Sea to Dawson. Roughly 4,000 persons landed at Valdez and attempted an overland route across glaciers, raging rivers, marshes, and mountains to Dawson. Others chose routes from such other coastal Alaska areas as Yakutat, the Copper River mouth, and Haines. Still others chose overland routes through Alberta, British Columbia, down the McKenzie River and into the Yukon drainage.

During 1898, some of the stampeders became either discouraged by the large numbers of Klondike gold seekers or distracted by reports of other gold strikes, even before reaching the Yukon gold fields. A reported 1,200 persons sailed north up Alaska's west coast to Kotzebue Sound, urged on by false reports of large strikes on the Kobuk River. Another 7,000 to 10,000 persons arrived in the Cook Inlet region.

By winter in 1898, an estimated 30,000 people were in the Yukon region. Of that number, 13,000 were in the Klondike district. Many of the


GOLD MINING DISTRICTS
OF ALASKA
50 0 50 100 miles
NORTH
mining activity
BROOKS RANGE
Kotzebue
Kobuk River
Shungnak
Wiseman
Bettles
Chandalar
Caro
Chandalar River
Porcupine River
CANADA
UNITED STATES
Wales
SEWARD
PENINSULA
Allakaket
Kanuti River
YUKON RIVER
Ft. Yukon
KOYUKUK RIVER
Beaver Creek
Circle
Nome
Golovin
Koyukuk
Tozitna River
Tanana
STEESE HIGHWAY
Chatanika
Fairbanks
Eagle
NORTON
SOUND
Ruby
Kaltag
Nenana
Dawson
Unalakleet
Unalakleet River
Poorman
Big Delta
Chicken
RIVER
Innoko River
ALASKA RAILROAD
RICHARDSON HIGHWAY
Tok
ALASKA
Ft. Selkirk
Ophir
Takotna
McGrath
RANGE
Iditarod
Flat
Susitna River
TOK CUTOFF
Slana
Carmacks
YUKON
Farewell
Rainy Pass
HIGHWAY
Skwenta River
GLENN HIGHWAY
Copper Center
KUSKOKWIM RIVER
ALASKA
Chitina
Champagne
Whitehorse
Susitna
Valdez
Anchorage
Bethel
Portage
Carcross
YUKON
BRITISH COLUMBIA
Hope
Whittier
ALASKA
Skagway
Seward
Klukwan
Haines
Yakutat
Homer
GULF OF ALASKA
Juneau
Dillingham
Sitka
BRISTOL BAY



Street scene, downtown Seattle during the days of '97 and '98. (University of Washington)

30,000 never reached their goal, and many left shortly after arriving, finding no gold or even unclaimed ground on which to stake and work.

About the same time gold was found in the Klondike, another discovery was made on the Seward Peninsula of Alaska. First reports of the strike were either doubted or ignored by stampeders with Klondike fever. But by September of 1898, people were convinced that another Klondike had been found. Just as at Fortymile and Circle, thousands deserted Dawson and existing diggings and headed for Nome hoping for a second chance to strike it rich. During the next few years, the creeks around Nome and then the Nome beaches constituted Alaska's greatest gold producing area.

The census of 1900 found 63,592 persons residing in Alaska. This was double the figure of 1890. The Native population, 30,000, remained basically unchanged over the decade. Thus, the gold rush was largely responsible for attracting about 30,000 new residents to Alaska by 1900. However, Alaska's greatest gold discovery was yet to occur.

Felix Pedro, in his travels to the Circle mining district in 1899, found gold in what was to be the Fairbanks area. He never rediscovered this site, but on July 22, 1902, Pedro once more struck gold in the same area. Again, the rush was on, and thousands came from the Klondike, from Nome, from the many other smaller districts, and from outside. By 1905, the Fairbanks district topped all others in Alaskan gold production.

And still there were more strikes. In 1906, gold was discovered in the upper Innoko drainage. That same year, the Chandalar strike brought hundreds of men into the Brooks Range. A year later, the sporadic mining in the upper Koyukuk drainage was greatly stimulated by a new strike in the Wiseman area. In 1908, the last major Alaskan gold strike occurred in the upper Iditarod drainage. Like so many times before, thousands abandoned meager diggings elsewhere, quit laboring jobs in boom towns, or caught steamers north to Alaska in search of that one big strike.

Most mining districts reached peak production within 4 or 5 years of discovery. Soon after discovery, most streams and other potential areas for gold were staked out, and most stampeders either left dejected or found work in other miners' operations or in nearby boom towns. However, even after the rush was over and most of the easily mined gold taken out, small numbers of miners hung on, making meager to modest incomes.

The use of hydraulic mining machinery after about 1912 sharply reduced the need for large numbers of laborers in the gold fields. This development accelerated the abandonment of already declining boom towns and mining districts. World War I marked the end of mining in most remaining districts and the end of the Gold Rush Era for all practical purposes

as labor was drawn off by the war effort and by construction of the Alaska Railroad.

The greatest production of gold in Alaska was reached in 1906. That year, Alaska was the second largest producer in the nation behind Colorado. Together, the two states accounted for one-half the gold production of the United States. In overall gold production to date, Alaska ranks fourth behind California, Colorado, and South Dakota. Among the hundreds of individual mining districts, the Fairbanks district ranks seventh nationally in total gold production, Juneau ranks eighth, and Nome ranks thirteenth.

Most of the gold produced in Alaska and the Yukon came from placer-type operations in the following areas:

Cook Inlet-Susitna	Kuskokwim River
Copper River	Seward Peninsula
Kenai Peninsula	Yukon River

Probably the richest areas were Fairbanks in the Yukon River area and Nome in the Seward Peninsula area. The Iditarod Trail passes through the Yukon River area after leaving Kaltag. Gold lode mines were also active in southeast Alaska and in the Fairbanks area. Probably the most noted mines were the Treadwell mines on Douglas Island and the Alaska-Juneau mine near Juneau.

Placer or alluvial deposits are accumulations of unattached particles of metals or minerals in erosional debris remaining after destruction of their host rock. These deposits occupy beds of ancient rivers or valleys and have been washed down from some vein or lode. The term lode applies to any zone or belt of mineralized rock lying within boundaries clearly separating it from the neighboring rock. Lode deposits are mined by underground methods and workings are reached by either vertical or inclined shafts or by adits. Placer deposits are worked by dredging, hydraulicking, sluicing, or by panning. Frozen bench gravels and stream valley deposits in the Yukon and in Alaska were drift mined. These deposits were covered by a thick layer of frozen overburden and shafts were sunk to bedrock to recover the gold values. The miners thawed the paystreak with fire and hauled the gravel to the surface where they processed it through sluice boxes to recover the gold. This very tedious process was used extensively in the Nome area during the gold rush days. Placer deposits could be worked with little or no capital expense and the individual prospector did not have to transport heavy machinery or mining equipment over great distances. The large dredges and the lode or underground miner followed the placer miner in many instances. The prospector and the small placer miner are perhaps the major factor in the settlement of what used to be the great territory of Alaska.

In terms of individual placer districts, the Fairbanks strike proved to be the most productive placer gold district in the United States with 7.2 million ounces of gold produced. Nome with 3.5 million ounces also ranks among the leading placer districts. However, in comparison, Canada's Klondike district tops all in North America with 11 million ounces produced.

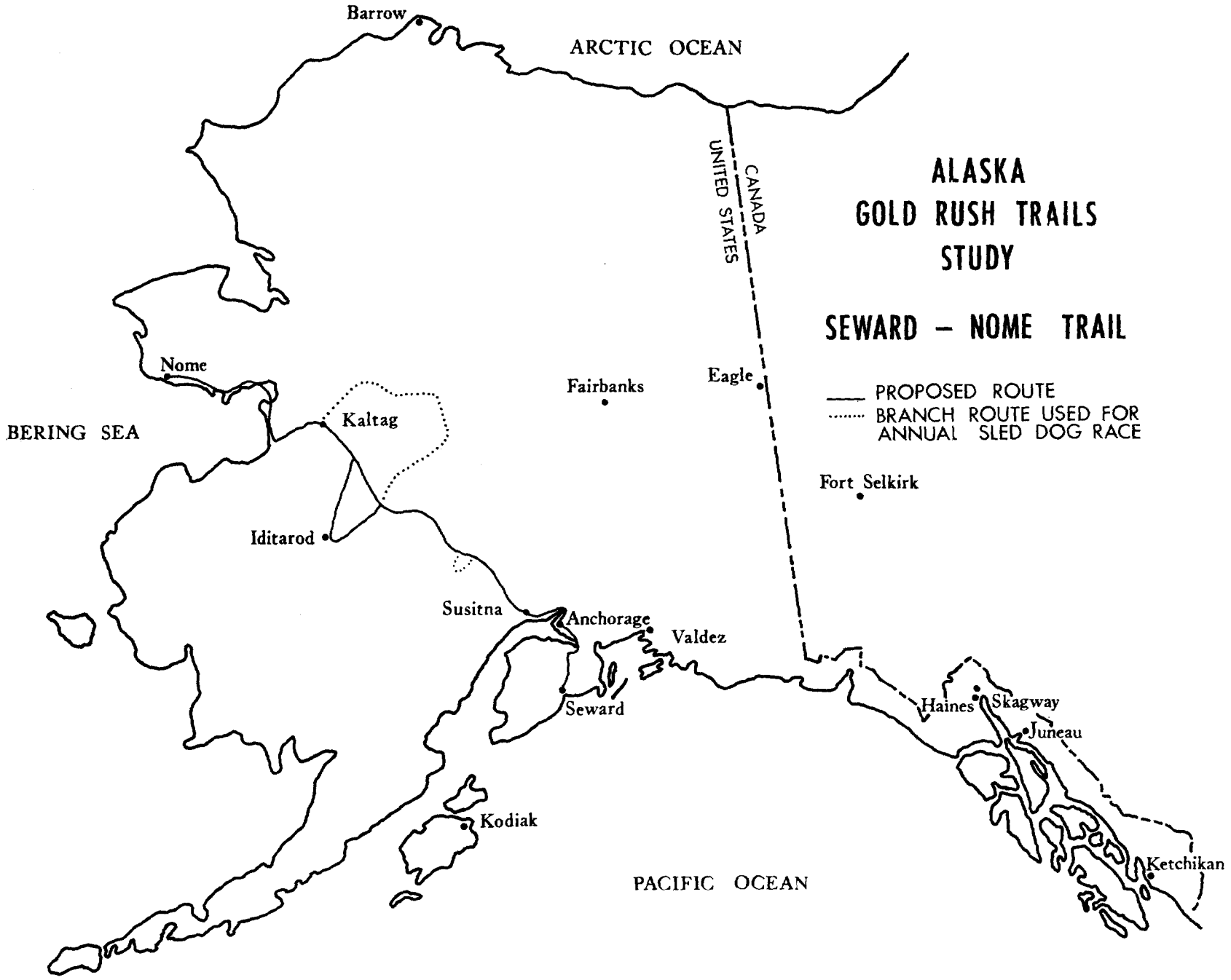
The Alaska-Yukon gold rush was of more importance than just the numbers of people involved and the amount of gold produced. Like the California Rush of 1849, the stampede to Alaska and the Yukon formed a chapter of the Nation's history and the cultural heritage of the hundreds of thousands of persons now residing in Alaska, the Yukon, and in the Puget Sound area of Washington State. Alfred Brooks, the head of the United States Geological Survey work in Alaska during the gold rush period, perhaps best summarizes the gold rush impact in his book, Blazing Alaska's Trails:

"The Klondike Gold"

> The educational value of the movement to the Klondike has been more than a minor factor in the building of the nation. Our great northwest territory became known to the nation; and while the exaggerated statements about the hardships and perils as well as the harshness of the climate at first broadcast many untruths, yet at least Americans learned that there was such a place as Alaska. Moreover, thousands reached the West Coast, who except for the lure of gold would never have seen the Pacific; a better knowledge of our great West and its people was thus broadcast. These were the broadening influences that affected to greater or less extent the whole people. In addition, there was the influence of half a hundred thousand who actually reached the shores of Alaska and, in some cases, even its great interior. The large part of them had come from a sheltered life and thus by actual contact came to know frontier life, that life which has been such a strong influence in moulding American character by developing initiative and self-reliance. Many a man from the farm, desk, or workshop came to know for the first time what it meant to be thrown entirely on his own resources. Life on the Klondike Trail was a great winnowing process. A man stood on his own feet. If he had the basal character, he won; if not, he became a derelict. A small percentage failed through lack of moral stamina, for there was ample opportunity to go to the dogs in the northern gold camps. On the other hand, many a man who had not developed beyond mediocrity in his own community, tightly bound by tradition and custom, found in Alaska his opportunity and

rose to his true level. This last of our frontiers, therefore, has played a part in developing breadth of view and character among our people.

Seward to Nome Route (Iditarod Trail)


Barrow
ARCTIC OCEAN
UNITED STATES
CANADA
ALASKA
GOLD RUSH TRAILS
STUDY
SEWARD – NOME TRAIL
PROPOSED ROUTE
BRANCH ROUTE USED FOR ANNUAL SLED DOG RACE
Nome
Fairbanks
Eagle
BERING SEA
Kaltag
Fort Selkirk
Iditarod
Susitna
Anchorage
Valdez
Seward
Haines
Skagway
Juneau
Kodiak
Ketchikan
PACIFIC OCEAN

SEWARD-NOME ROUTE (IDITAROD TRAIL)

BACKGROUND

The Seward-Nome Route is composed of trails resulting from several gold strikes occurring in different areas at different times. Although popularly known as the Iditarod Trail, only a portion of the Seward to Nome route was constructed and used to reach the Iditarod gold fields.

This route can be best discussed in three segments: Seward to Susitna; Susitna to Kaltag; and Kaltag to Nome.

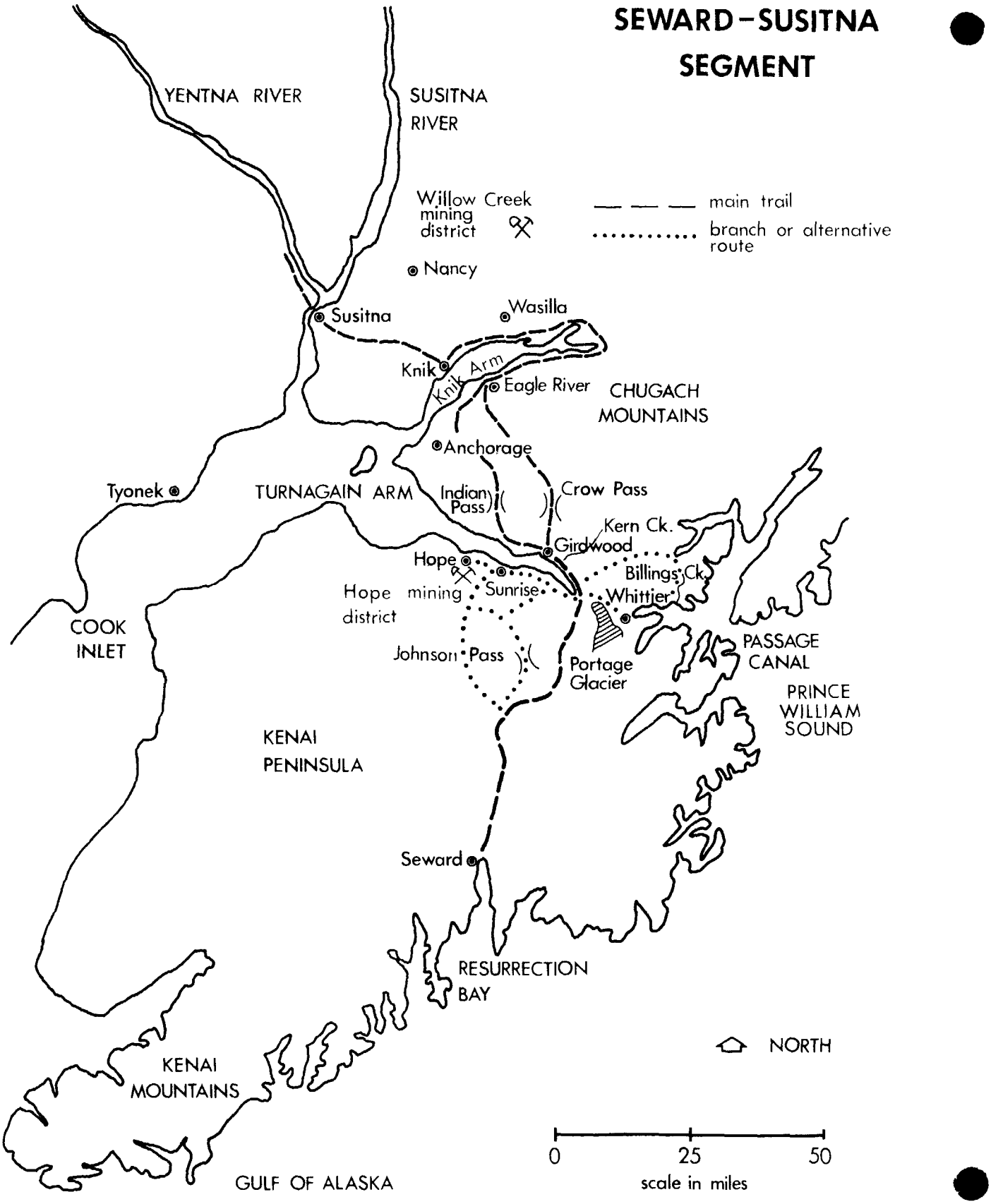
Seward-Susitna

Gold was first reported on the Kenai Peninsula by Russian fur traders as early as 1834. However, it was not until 1888 when a prospector named King found placer gold in the Hope area that serious interest in prospecting and mining in the region developed. Between 1888 and 1896, many claims were staked in the Hope-Sunrise area and across Turnagain Arm in the area of what is now Girdwood. News of strikes in the Sunrise district stimulated a rush in 1896 which brought 2,000 to 2,500 people into the Upper Cook Inlet area.

Many of these people came by steamer to the Native village of Tyonek on the west shore of Cook Inlet. Here they transferred to shallower-draft boats to reach the settlements in the upper Inlet. Hundreds of persons also sailed to Passage Canal in Prince William Sound, disembarked near the present town of Whittier, and walked across the divide and Portage Glacier to the head of Turnagain Arm and to Hope and Sunrise. In 1794, the English explorer George Vancouver reported this portage route being used by Russian fur traders, who in turn were following a route used for hundreds of years by Natives.

A second rush to the area took place in 1898, probably more as a result of the Klondike Stampede and its overflow than from recent strikes in the Sunrise area. The summer of 1898 brought an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 persons into Cook Inlet. Sunrise and Hope were the destinations for most. However, the old fur trading center of Susitna and the emerging trade center of Knik also attracted many. Most came directly to the area by water, but others used the glacier trail from Passage Canal. Crevasses restricted safe travel by this route to winter and spring months. An alternate route on Billings Creek and down the Twentymile River drainage was occasionally used in summer.

In 1898, Thomas Mendenhall explored a route from the head of Resurrection Bay near the present town of Seward to the Hope-Sunrise area and then around Turnagain Arm, over Crow Pass, and across Knik Arm to Knik. At this time, travel from Resurrection Bay to the Hope-Sunrise area


SEWARD–SUSITNA SEGMENT
YENTNA RIVER
SUSITNA RIVER
Willow Creek mining district
main trail
branch or alternative route
Nancy
Susitna
Wasilla
Knik
Knik Arm
Eagle River
CHUGACH MOUNTAINS
Anchorage
Tyonek
TURNAGAIN ARM
Indian Pass
Crow Pass
Kern Ck.
Girdwood
Hope
Billings Ck.
Hope mining district
Sunrise
Whittier
COOK INLET
Johnson Pass
Portage Glacier
PASSAGE CANAL
PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND
KENAI PENINSULA
Seward
RESURRECTION BAY
NORTH
KENAI MOUNTAINS
0
25
50
scale in miles
GULF OF ALASKA

and over Crow Pass had been undertaken occasionally by prospectors, but no real trails existed.

A trail from Prince William Sound to Turnagain Arm was used aboriginally by the Tanaina Indians and Chugachmiut Eskimos. Natives living in the Upper Inlet area of the Cook Inlet Region still tell stories of how the Chugach used the trail in order to wage battles against the Tanaina.

Cook Inlet was normally not navigable during the winter months. Susitna, Knik, Sunrise, and Hope were dependent on winter mail and supplies coming from the ice-free landing sites in Passage Canal and Resurrection Bay. With the growing population in the upper Inlet and with the desire to maintain communications and supply lines, a system of trails soon developed.

By 1900, crude winter trails for pack horses and dog teams were developed between Resurrection Bay and the Sunrise area and between Sunrise and Knik and Susitna. In 1902, the first regularly scheduled mail contract was let for service between Resurrection Bay and Sunrise and Hope.

After the strikes of 1902 in the Yentna River District and of 1906 in the Willow Creek District, winter trails from Seward to Susitna were well established, providing transportation for mail, supplies, and travelers.

Between 1904 and 1906, approximately 50 miles of the Alaska Central Railroad were constructed from Seward toward Turnagain Arm. By 1909, the railroad, then under the name of the Alaska Northern Railroad, had been completed around the eastern end of Turnagain Arm to mile 71 at Kern Creek.

Susitna-Kaltag

Travel into the upper Kuskokwim and Innoko River country before 1905 was limited to a few Russian explorers in the 1830's and 1840's, to several USCS and military exploration parties at the turn of the century, and to occasional prospectors.

In the summer of 1906, a prospecting party led by Thomas Ganes crossed from the Kuskokwim River into the upper Innoko drainage and struck gold on Ganes Creek. That winter, news of the strike caused a stampede by miners, mostly from along the Yukon River. These early prospectors crossed overland from Kaltag and from the trading post of Lewis Landing on the Yukon. When navigation opened that summer, 800 to 900 people came down the Yukon from Fairbanks and up the Innoko to the Indian settlement of Dishkaket. Several hundred persons also sailed from Nome up the Yukon and Innoko. From Dishkaket, people lined or poled upriver to Ganes Creek.

During the winter of 1907-08, men and supplies were transported overland from Kaltag and Lewis Landing by dog team to the town of Moore City on Ganes Creek. A strike on nearby Ophir Creek in early 1908, left Moore City deserted, and the new town of Ophir sprang up.

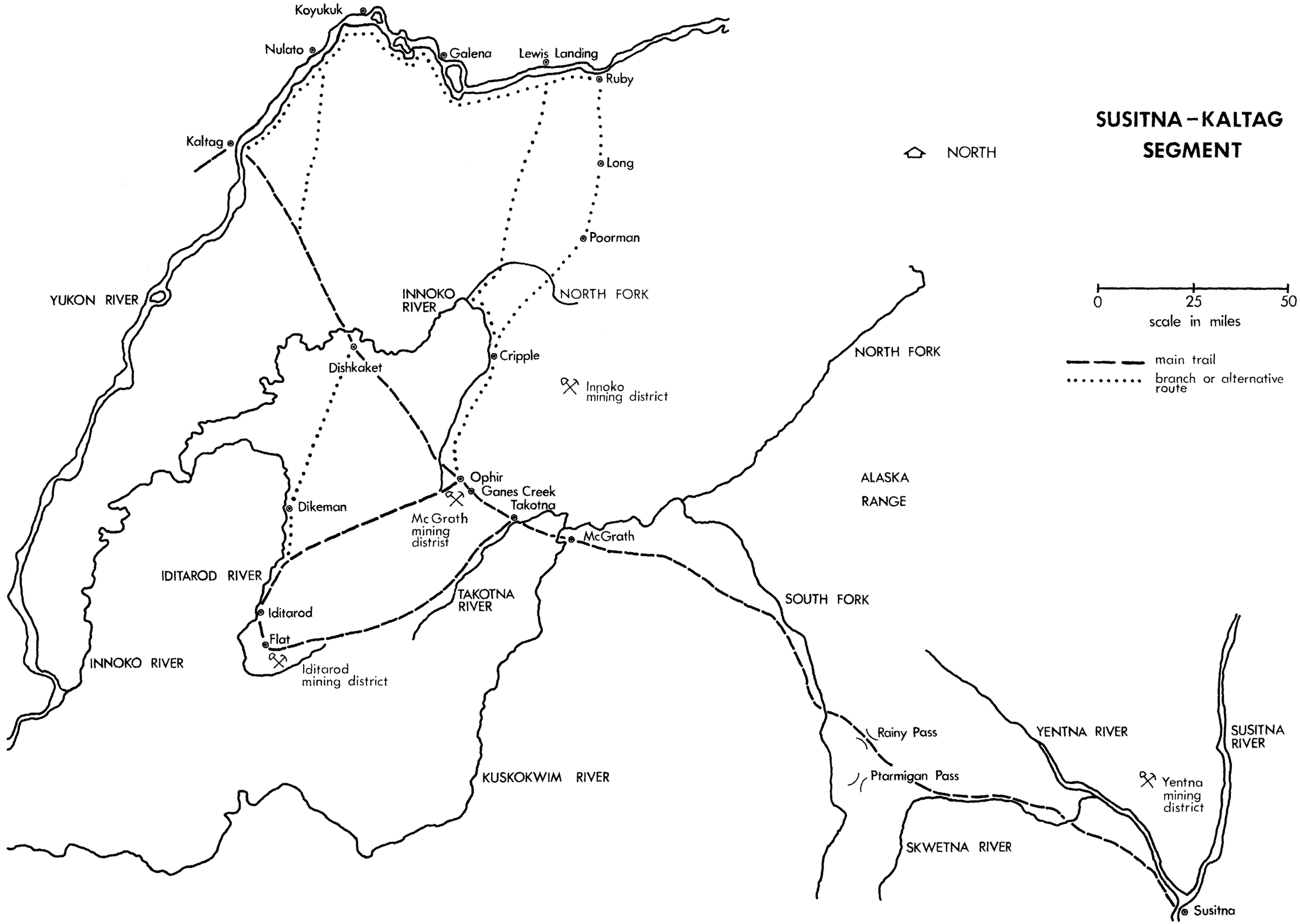
In 1908, W. L. Goodwin of the Alaska Road Commission surveyed a new trail from Seward to Nome. This trail was to provide more direct winter transportation to Nome and at the same time provide overland access to the new strikes in the Innoko district. Goodwin completed his survey utilizing existing routes from the end of the Alaska Central Railroad at about mile 54, around Turnagain Arm, over Crow Pass, and around Knik Arm, to Knik and Susitna, and also from Kaltag over the divide to Unalakleet and around Norton Sound to Nome. Persons were reported traveling from Susitna to Ophir during the late winter of 1908 and the winter of 1908-09, utilizing river ice corridors adjacent to Goodwin's survey route.

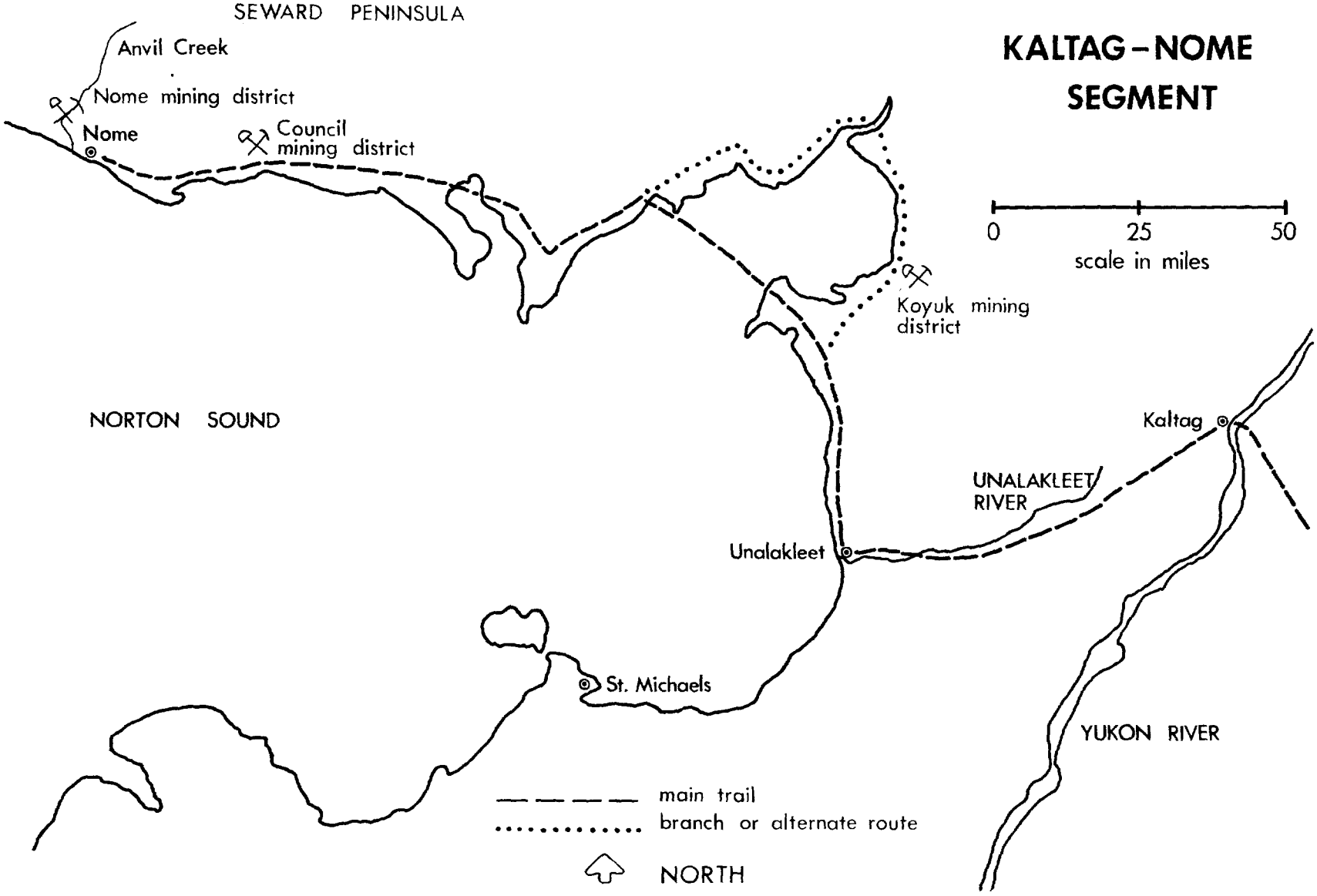
W. A. Dikeman and John Beaton descended the Innoko in late summer of 1908 and went up one of its major tributaries, the Haiditarod, or as it later became known, the Iditarod. On Christmas Day 1908, they reportedly struck gold on Otter Creek. News of the Iditarod strike was slow to spread, and the summer of 1909 attracted only several hundred persons into the area, mainly from the Innoko district and from along the Yukon River. Little mining occurred that summer because of poor transportation and a lack of equipment and supplies, but considerable claim staking took place. During the winter of 1909-10, reports of rich strikes were widespread. Approximately 2,000 people traveled the Yukon, Innoko, and Iditarod Rivers when navigation opened in the summer of 1910. In all, an estimated 2,500 people stampeded to the Iditarod goldfield, resulting in the new towns of Dikeman at the low water head of steamer navigation, Iditarod at the extreme head of navigation, and Flat, Otter, Bowlder (Boulder), and Discovery.

The Iditarod strike and production of gold in 1910 helped prompt the Alaska Road Commission to begin work on the Seward to Nome trail which had been surveyed by Goodwin in 1908. During the winter of 1910-11, nearly 1,000 miles of trail were marked and cleared from Nome to the Alaska Northern railhead at Kern Creek, 71 miles north of Seward. Although most of the new trail work occurred between the present site of McGrath and Susitna, considerable work was accomplished in marking and repairing the existing routes between Kern Creek and Susitna, between Kaltag and Nome, between Kaltag and the Ophir area, and the branch routes to Iditarod and Flat.

This route was authorized by the Alaska Road Commission as the Rainy Pass-Kaltag Trail, but because the Iditarod mining district was the most common destination, it became known as the Iditarod Trail. From 1911 to 1925, hundreds of people walked and mushed over the trail between Iditarod and Knik or Seward. The trail from Kaltag to Iditarod and to Ophir was used to bring people and supplies in from the Yukon.

SUSITNA – KALTAG SEGMENT




SEWARD PENINSULA
Anvil Creek
Nome mining district
Nome
Council mining district
KALTAG – NOME SEGMENT
0
25
50
scale in miles
Koyuk mining district
NORTON SOUND
Kaltag
UNALAKLEET RIVER
Unalakleet
St. Michaels
YUKON RIVER
main trail
branch or alternate route
NORTH

As new gold districts developed in the upper Kuskokwim area and in the Long-Poorman-Cripple area, various branch and connecting trails developed around the Iditarod Trail. Several segments were upgraded to wagon roads, notably the portage route between Takotna in the Kuskokwim drainage and Ophir on the Innoko, and between Iditarod and Flat.

Kaltag-Nome

The first reports of gold on the Seward Peninsula in 1888 received little attention by the outside world. However, in the late fall of 1898, news of the strike at Anvil Creek drew hundreds of gold seekers down the Yukon from the Klondike. Steamers from Seattle and parts of Alaska headed for the Bering Sea and the Nome area. Freeze-up caught most of the boats coming down the Yukon, and most of the ocean-going vessels got no farther than the tip of the Alaska Peninsula.

Although most waited out the winter, several hundred persons continued down the Yukon River by dog team or on foot. They left the river at the Indian village of Kaltag, crossing the historic Native portage route into the Unalakleet River drainage. From the Eskimo village of Unalakleet on Norton Sound, they traveled around the Sound to Nome.

In the next 2 years, thousands of people rushed to Nome, first to the placer deposits in the several creeks in the area, and then in 1900 to the gold-bearing sands of the Nome beach. Nome was easily reached by steamer during ice-free months with no overland travel required.

As Nome grew quickly into Alaska's richest mining region, its population swelled to 12,500 in 1900. Communication with other areas was badly needed during the many months when navigation was not possible. In 1900 and 1901, a telegraph line was constructed from Nome to Fort Gibbon at the Tanana-Yukon confluence. Between Nome and St. Michaels, the first sea cable in Alaska was installed. From St. Michaels, the line went north to Unalakleet, then over the portage route to Kaltag and up the Yukon River. The sea cable was replaced by the first long-distance wireless telegraph in the United States by 1903.

Winter mail was also carried along the Yukon between Nome and Dawson at the turn of the century. The Fairbanks gold strike in 1902, and the subsequent rush to the Alaskan interior stimulated development of the mail route from Valdez to Fairbanks. By the winter of 1905-06, the trail from Valdez brought mail to Fairbanks which in turn was carried down the Yukon by dog team to Kaltag, over to Unalakleet, and around Norton Sound to Nome.

LOCATION AND REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

General Alignment

The Seward to Nome trail surveyed by Goodwin in 1908 ran from mile 54 of the Alaska Railroad around Turnagain Arm, over Crow Pass, around Knik Arm to Knik, Susitna, Happy River, Pass Creek, over Rainy Pass, down Dalzell Creek to the Rohn River (or Tatina River), across the South Fork of the Kuskokwim to Big River, to the present-day site of McGrath, to Takotna, Ophir, Dishkaket, Kaltag, and Unalakleet, up Norton Sound to the Ungalik River, across the Sound to Isaacs Roadhouse on Bald Head, and along the shoreline to Nome.

During construction of the trail in the winter of 1910-11, some route changes were made and additional trails marked. Most notable of these were the trail from Dishkaket to Dikeman and on to Iditarod and Flat, and the trail from Iditarod up Bonanza Creek and down Fourth of July Creek to Takotna. In addition to these routes, a third trail connecting the surveyed route with the Iditarod district existed in 1910. This trail provided a direct route between Ophir and Iditarod, crossing the Dishna River near Windy Creek, and intersecting the Dikeman-Iditarod Trail near Moose Creek.

Although the surveyed route crossed Crow Pass from Girdwood, a new trail was constructed from Girdwood down Turnagain Arm and over Indian Creek Pass in the fall of 1908. As this route avoided the avalanche problems and extreme steepness of Crow Pass, it was used and improved during construction of the Kaltag-Rainy Pass Trail in the winter of 1910-11. However, Goodwin rebuilt the trail through Crow Pass avoiding some of the snowslide areas in the summer of 1911, favoring this new route because it was 15 to 20 miles shorter and had only about a mile of "bad going" as opposed to 5 miles reported for the Indian Creek Pass route. Both the Indian Creek Pass and the Crow Pass routes were used until the railroad was completed around the mountains via Anchorage in 1918.

Other branch trails include the glacier route between Whittier and Portage and the route from Passage Canal down the Twentymile drainage to the railroad. Two main trails were used to reach Hope and Sunrise, one crossing Moose Pass from the railroad and up Quartz Creek, and the other leaving the railroad grade at Trail Creek, going up Johnson Creek and down the Sixmile Creek drainage. A trail from Nulato which intersected the Kaltag-Dishkaket trail was used as a shortcut to carry mail and supplies to Iditarod from Fairbanks. The old route from Lewis Landing to Ophir followed the North Fork down to the Innoko, then up the Innoko River through Cripple to Ophir. When Cripple developed as a mining center, a winter route was established to connect it with the Ruby-Long-Poorman district to the east.

Cross-country skiers along the Iditarod Trail in the Alaska Range. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

In the early twenties, summer trails were constructed linking Ophir with Poorman and Ruby, and linking Flat with Takotna. When the Alaska Railroad was completed to Nancy, a new winter trail was built from there to Susitna.

Since March of 1973, a sled dog race from Anchorage to Nome has been held annually. Because this race is billed as the Iditarod Trail Race, the race route is also shown on the accompanying topographic maps (pages 72 through 81). This route varies substantially from the old Rainy Pass-Kaltag Trail in the vicinity of the Alaska Range and between Ophir and Kaltag. The route goes through Ptarmigan Pass rather than Rainy Pass to avoid avalanche danger. In order to touch Native villages along the Yukon, the route follows the newer summer trail out of Ophir through Bear Creek and Folger to Poorman, over the road to Ruby, and down the Yukon through Galena, Koyukuk, and Nulato to Kaltag.

In many areas, the race route crosses sea and lake ice, rivers, and open tundra areas. Here, no trail as such exists, but rather tripods or stakes are used to mark the route. Most of these have to be replaced every year and trail alignments vary by as much as a mile or more from year to year.

Length

Table I gives the approximate mileage of the various historic trail segments, including the present sled dog race route, which total 2,037 miles.

The originally surveyed Rainy Pass-Kaltag Trail which bypassed the Iditarod-Flat area was 914 miles in length from Seward to Nome. The loop to Iditarod was 185 miles in length. The sum of the other historically used branch segments is 938 miles. The sled dog race route from Anchorage to Nome is reported to be 1,049 miles long.

Climate

The National Weather Service describes the climatic zone covering much of the Seward to Nome route as transitional. This zone is characterized by 12 to 30 inches of precipitation annually (average 17 inches) and mean annual temperatures from 22°F to 35°F (90°F maximum; -70°F minimum). Around the McGrath area, a more continental climate is encountered with somewhat colder winter temperatures, warmer summer temperatures, and less precipitation than those regions receiving more maritime influences. In the Seward area, a maritime climatic zone exists. Here precipitation is considerably greater (80 inches), and winter temperatures less extreme.

Over much of the route, winters are long, dark, and severe, beginning with the freeze-up of lakes and streams in October and ending with break-up, usually in May. Snowfall averages 50 to 100 inches a year

TABLE I. Mileages and General Land Status of Trail Segments: Seward to Nome Route (Does not include potential public easements)

SEGMENT	Main Route MILES	LAND STATUS (in miles)
Seward - Girdwood	75	75 mi. Alaska Railroad (U.S.)
Girdwood - Eagle River (via Indian Creek Pass) (via Crow Pass)	 38 44	40 mi. Chugach State Park 7 mi. Chugach National Forest 29 mi. State highways, roads 5 mi. U. S. Army Reservation 1 mi. private
Eagle - Knik*	55	35 mi. State highways, roads 20 mi. State tidelands
Knik - Susitna*	38	21.5 mi. State 1.5 mi. private 15.0 mi. Mat-Su Borough
Susitna - Old Skwentna (via Alexander Lake)	38	Virtually all in State ownership (some may be transferred to Mat-Su Borough)
Old Skwentna - Rainy Pass Lodge*	52	Virtually all in State ownership
Rainy Pass Lodge - Farewell	52	Virtually all selected for ownership by State
Farewell - McGrath*	80	Approx. 65 mi. proposed for inclusion in Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest; 15 mi. withdrawn for selection by Native corporations
McGrath - Takotna*	17	Virtually all withdrawn for selection by Native corporations
Takotna - Ophir*	24	Virtually all overlain by State-owned road through Native and State selected lands
Takotna - Iditarod - Ophir Loop*	185	170 mi. selected by State 15 mi. withdrawn for Native selection

Ophir - Dishkaket	55	Approx. 30 mi. through State selected lands; 25 mi. proposed for inclusion in Koyukuk Nat'l Wildlife Refuge
Dishkaket - Kaltag	66	Approx. 15 mi. withdrawn for Native selection; 15 mi. on (d)(1) lands (BLM); 36 mi. proposed for Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge
Kaltag - Unalakleet*	96	41 mi. withdrawn for Native selection; 50 mi. proposed for Unalakleet National Wild River (BLM); 5 mi. in (d)(1) lands (BLM)
Unalakleet - Solomon*	152	Virtually all withdrawn for Native selection
Solomon - Nome*	32	Overlain by State highway through Native selected lands
SUBTOTAL - Main Route	1,099	

Other Branch Segments

Moose Pass - Sunrise (via Summit Lake)	44	34 mi. overlain by State highway; 10 mi. Chugach National Forest
Moose Pass - Granite Creek Guard Station (via Johnson Pass)	22	Chugach National Forest
Granite Creek Guard Station - Canyon Creek	8	Overlain by State highway
Sunrise - Hope	8	Overlain by State highway
Whittier - Portage		10 mi. Chugach National Forest
(via Portage Lake)	17	7 mi. overlain by State highway
(via Twentymile)	25	Chugach National Forest
Anchorage - Fort Richardson*	12	4 mi. Anchorage Municipality 8 mi. U.S. Army reservation
Susitna - Nancy	22	15 mi. State patented land 7 mi. Mat-Su Borough land

Susitna - Old Skwentna (via Skwentna Airfield)*	50	State patented land
Rainy Pass Lodge - Rohn (Tatina) River (via Ptarmigan Pass)*	75	State patented land
Farewell Lake - Bear Creek (via Fairwell FAA Airfield)*	26	State patented land
Ganes Creek - Flat (summer trail)	72	State patented land
American Creek - Cripple Landing	26	State selected land
Cripple Landing - Lewis Landing	60	45 mi. State selected land 15 mi. (d)(1) land (BLM)
Cripple - Folger	12	State selected land
Dishkaket - Moose Creek (via Dikeman)	67	20 mi. (d)(2) (proposed Nat'l Wildlife Refuge-FWS); 47 mi. State selected land
Magitchlie Creek - Nulato	52	45 mi. Native selection 7 mi. State selected land
Ophir - Folger*	40	State selected land
Folger - Poorman*	53	State selected land
Poorman - Ruby*	58	Overlain by State highway
Ruby - Lewis Landing*	15	Yukon River (Statehood claim)
Lewis Landing - Galena*	36	Yukon River (Statehood claim)
Galena - Nulato*	52	Yukon River (Statehood claim)
Nulato - Kaltag*	40	Yukon River (Statehood claim)
Golovin - Topkok (via White Mountain)*	36	Native selected land
SUBTOTAL - Other Branch Segments	938	
TOTAL	2,037	

*Segments utilized all or in part in the Annual Iditarod Trail Race.

with accumulations averaging 2 to 5 feet, depending on elevation and wind conditions. Winds along Norton Sound and in the mountainous regions are common and can bring chill factors in the winter down to -100°F and colder. Extended periods of -40°F to -60°F are common in the interior. On the shortest day of the year, only about 2 to 6 hours of daylight occur along the trail route.

Summers are short but warm over most of the route with temperatures often in the 70's and 80's in the interior. On the longest day, sunlight averages from 20 to 22 hours with twilight during the remaining 2 to 4 hours. Precipitation averages 4 to 6 inches during the summer months. Although freezing temperatures have been reported in all months except July in most areas, a frost-free season generally extends from the first of June to the end of August.

Permafrost underlies much of the route, especially north of the Kuskokwim River. The Innoko and Kuskokwim Valleys are underlain with isolated masses of permafrost. Permafrost throughout the Alaska Range is discontinuous. The region from Seward to Susitna is generally free of permafrost.

Topography

Topography varies from the tidewater lagoons, spits, and barrier beaches of the Seward Peninsula, to the high rugged peaks of the Alaska Range and Chugach Mountains. From Seward to Knik Arm, the route traverses narrow valleys through the Kenai and Chugach Mountains. Relief is great with 3,000- to 5,000-foot peaks rising 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the valley floors. Crow Pass is approximately 3,500 feet in elevation while Indian Creek Pass is 2,300 feet.

From Knik to the south slope of the Alaska Range, the gently rolling lowlands of the Susitna River valley are traversed. Rainy Pass provides a comparatively short gentle route through the rugged Alaska Range, reaching an elevation of approximately 3,350 feet. Peaks in the area exceed 5,000 feet. From Farewell Lake on the north side of the Range to Takotna, the route crosses the extensive Kuskokwim River valley. Relief is low and elevations range from 400 to 1,000 feet.

The low mountains, hills, and ridges of the Kuskokwim Mountains extend northeast to southwest across the Ophir and Iditarod region in the upper Innoko River drainages. Relief is moderate with most ridges and peaks between 2,000 and 3,000 feet, dissected by broad valleys 200 to 1,000 feet in elevation. Similar relief is encountered across the Kaiyuh Mountains which are separated from the Kuskokwim Mountains by the low flats of the Innoko River.

After crossing the Yukon River at Kaltag, the route follows the broad Unalakleet River valley through the adjacent Kaltag Mountains, averaging 2,000 to 3,000 feet in elevation. After reaching Unalakleet, the

trail generally stays at or near sea level as it skirts the barren coastline of Norton Sound to Nome.

Vegetation

The different climatic zones, permafrost conditions, wildfire, topography, and soils encountered along the route combine to provide a wide variety of vegetative ecosystems. Alpine tundra is found in the passes of the Chugach Mountains, the Alaska Range, and the Kuskokwim Mountains between Ophir and Iditarod. Wet tundra is found in areas around Norton Sound. Over much of the Seward to Turnagain Arm area, a coastal western hemlock-Sitka spruce forest system exists up to an elevation of 2,000 to 3,000 feet. From Knik to the Alaska Range, lowland spruce-hardwood forests and bottomland spruce-poplar forests are encountered.

On either side of Rainy Pass, an upland spruce-hardwood forest is present up to an elevation of approximately 2,500 feet. The Kuskokwim valley is largely covered with lowland spruce-hardwood forest, as is the Innoko River valley. The valleys through the Kuskokwim Mountains, the Kaiyuh Mountains, and Kaltag Mountains are generally covered with an upland spruce-hardwood forest. A major high brush system is located in the Nome area.

Throughout the forested areas, many open areas of muskeg, marshes, shallow lakes, and grass tussocks are found. Dense willow and alder thickets are common along rivers and streams.

Fish and Wildlife

Large game animals are common throughout the region, although most populations are sparse in relation to land area because of the harsh climatic conditions and absence of available winter food. Caribou, moose, Dall sheep, black bear, brown/grizzly bear, and wolves are present locally in varying populations. Fur-bearers--including lynx, wolverine, beaver, mink, river otter, weasel, marten, and muskrat--are relatively abundant over much of the interior.

Important waterfowl nesting areas are located in the Innoko and Kuskokwim valleys and along the shores of Norton Sound. Common raptors in the area include the northern bald eagle, golden eagle, osprey, and a variety of hawks and owls. In addition, the endangered American peregrine falcon is believed to be present in the area.

Sport fish species common in various areas of the route include grayling, arctic char, northern pike, Dolly Varden, lake trout, rainbow trout, and five species of salmon. In the Norton Sound region, along the Yukon, and in the Seward area, commercial and subsistence fishing for salmon plays an important part in the local and regional economies.

During the summer, mosquitoes and biting flies are so numerous in places that unprotected persons risk serious injury. Even repellants and headnets are not always adequate protection against the endless attack.

Minerals

Areas underlying the route are potentially favorable for geothermal energy development, uranium, copper, lead, zinc, gold, silver, and other minerals. The segment of the route between Kaltag and Nome passes through several areas identified as having high potential for mineral development. In the Nome area, potential development of gold, lead, zinc, silver, barium, tin, antimony, and tungsten is indicated. In addition, the Unalakleet River area and most of the route along the east shoreline of Norton Sound are identified as having low potential for oil and gas.

The Iditarod-Ophir-Takotna region is identified as having high potential for gold development. In addition to gold, there is a high potential for tin in the Poorman area.

A portion of the Kuskokwim valley east of McGrath traversed by the route has low potential for oil and gas. Although high potential for gold, copper, lead, and zinc is indicated in areas to the north and south, no potential is identified along the route through the Rainy Pass region.

The lower Susitna River valley has moderate to high potential for oil, gas, and coal. The Upper Cook Inlet and Chugach Mountain regions have a high potential for chromium, nickel, platinum, copper, and gold.

Land Uses and Access

With the exception of a few small towns and Native villages, the route between Knik and Nome is largely uninhabited. Little land has been cleared and a primitive environment exists over much of the distance. Hunting, fishing, trapping, berry picking, and log cutting are taking place around villages and towns. These activities generally occur within a radius of 30 miles of the settlements.

Mining operations continue at many locations along the route, including Nome and vicinity, Ungalik, Cape Nome, Flat, Ruby, Lime Hills, Steelmute/Barometer, and Iditarod.

Nearly 200,000 persons live between Seward and Knik. This area surrounding Anchorage is the largest population concentration in Alaska. Urban development is occurring rapidly and much of the land is being used for residential, agricultural, recreational, commercial, and industrial purposes.

Between Seward and Knik, a major highway system exists which affords access to the historic trail at numerous points. Beyond Knik, no portion of the historic route is road accessible from the major highway net. However, short unconnected roads exist between Sterling Landing, just south of McGrath, through Takotna to Ophir; between Iditarod, Flat, and Discovery; between Poorman and Ruby; and between Solomon and Nome.

Airstrips are found at most settlements along the trail and McGrath, Galena, Unalakleet, and Nome are served by regular commercial jet service. The villages along the Yukon, including Ruby and Kaltag, and the villages around Norton Sound are served at least once a week by smaller commercial aircraft. The Alaska Railroad connecting Seward and Whittier with Anchorage and Fairbanks crosses the trail at a number of points.

General Land Ownership

Most (84 percent) of the land along the route is currently in public ownership. The State currently owns most of the trail (63 percent) with most of the remainder almost evenly divided between the Federal government (20 percent) and Native corporations (16 percent). With the exception of the section owned by the Alaska Railroad, from Seward to Girdwood through the Chugach National Forest, the federally owned segments currently are managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

The Alaska Statehood Act and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA) set in motion substantial changes in future land ownership and management in Alaska. Approximately 40 million acres are being selected for ownership by Native corporations and 103 million acres by the State of Alaska. Additionally, some 90 million acres of public domain lands have been recommended for inclusion in the National Park, National Wildlife Refuge, National Forest, and National Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems.

Most of the land around Norton Sound from Unalakleet and Nome has been withdrawn for Native selection. Similarly, most of the land along the Yukon River from Ruby to Kaltag has been withdrawn for Native selection, although the Yukon riverbed itself is claimed by the State. The villages of Takotna and McGrath will also be selecting lands along the route in the Kuskokwim River valley. The village of Eklutna is currently selecting several townships through which the route passes.

The State of Alaska has made land selections covering most of the route through the Alaska Range and through the Kuskokwim Mountains. In addition to State lands already patented in the Susitna River valley, the routes over Crow Pass and Indian Creek Pass are included in Chugach State Park.

Of the 90 million acres proposed for addition to the four national conservation systems, three proposals include lands along the route. The Innoko lowlands around Dishkaket are included in the Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge proposal and the Kuskokwim River valley between the Alaska Range and McGrath is included in the Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest proposal. The lands surrounding the upper 50 miles of the Unalakleet River are included in the Unalakleet National Wild River proposal.

Native lands selections continue, action on proposed additions to the national systems are to be taken by December 1978, and all State land selections made by 1985.

In addition to Native lands which will be privately owned, many small tracts between Seward and the Knik area are in private ownership. Some private land and an undetermined number of mining claims also exist in the Iditarod-Flat, Ophir, and Takotna areas.

Virtually all of the route was part of the territorial system of roads and trails and was maintained by the Alaska Road Commission using Federal and/or territorial monies. The State of Alaska maintains that a right-of-way still exists in the name of the State along all such roads and trails pursuant to revised Statute 2477 authorized by Congress in 1866.

The current Bureau of Land Management land status records show a reservation under 44LD513 (Department of the Interior land decisions) for the section of the route between Kaltag and Unalakleet. As such, this segment would be reserved for public purposes in Federal ownership should patent be transferred.

Section 17(b) of the Native Claims Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to reserve easements for public use and access as he determines are necessary on lands selected by village or regional corporations. The Bureau of Land Management is currently receiving recommendations from various agencies and the public for easements, including portions of the Seward-Nome route, across lands selected by Native corporations. Easements must be identified prior to the final conveyance of patent to the various corporations over the next several years.

A general listing of land ownership is summarized in Table II.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Period and Type of Use

Seward-Susitna

From 1896 to 1917, thousands of people passed over the route from Seward and Whittier to Hope, Sunrise, Girdwood, Knik, and Susitna. Because

TABLE II. Summary of Existing or Potential Ownership of Trail Segments

	MILES	PERCENT
Federal		
U. S. Forest Service	139	7
Bureau of Land Management	85	4
Fish and Wildlife Service	81	4
U. S. Army	13	1
Alaska Railroad	75	4
Subtotal	393	20
State	1,279.5 [1/]	63
Local Governments	26	1
Native Corporations	336 [2/]	16
Other Private	2.5	+
TOTAL	2,037	100

1/ Includes existing roads and highways and the Yukon riverbed.

2/ Public easements have been proposed along all or most of this distance.

Cook Inlet provided good boat transportation in the ice-free season, most of the trails were used largely as winter trails when packed snow provided a smooth surface over normally rough or wet terrain. Winter travel was most common by dog team, although many persons walked or snowshoed the trails. Occasionally, horses, sometimes outfitted with snowshoes, traversed the route, although limited winter forage prevented widespread use. Many of the trails were broken regularly by mail carriers.

A few routes were also used in the summer by pack horses. Harry Revelle had one of the first pack trains which operated between Sunrise and Hope around the turn of the century.

As the Alaska Railroad was completed farther and farther north from Seward, trail segments were abandoned. After 1910, the railroad grade was utilized between Seward and Kern Creek. After completion of the railroad from Kern Creek to Wasilla through the new town of Anchorage in 1918, the trails over Indian Creek and Crow Passes were seldom used. When the rails were laid to Wasilla and then north to Nancy and beyond, the bypassed town of Knik also was all but abandoned. In 1920, a new trail was built from Nancy to Susitna which virtually ended travel through Knik. Also by 1920, summer wagon roads and car roads had replaced major segments of the old routes.

World War I hastened the decline of gold mining in the region and it never again reached the prominence experienced in the early 1900's. Mines in the Hope-Sunrise area and in the Willow Creek area closed down as manpower was drawn off by the war and by railroad construction. However, several mines continued operating until the early 1950's.

Susitna-Kaltag

The first rush to the Innoko district occurred from the Yukon River in early 1907. Overland winter trails began to be established from Lewis Landing and Kaltag to the Ophir area at that time. These trails were extended to the Iditarod district after gold was discovered there during the winter of 1908-09. Peak gold production took place in both districts in 1912. At that time, hundreds of persons annually were traveling the newly constructed Iditarod Trail between Seward and Knik and the mining districts. Heavy traffic continued over that trail until around 1920. By then, mining activity had declined substantially and the Alaska Railroad had been completed north of the Alaska Range.

Although Goodwin's Rainy Pass-Kaltag Trail was intended to shorten the winter mail route from Seward to Nome by over 300 miles, the trail was never used for this purpose. The mail contract continued to be won by carriers using the route from Valdez through Fairbanks, down the Yukon River, and over the Kaltag-Nome trail. Between 1910 and 1914, the mail to the Innoko and Iditarod districts also was carried down the Yukon from Fairbanks, even after the completion of the

Iditarod Trail from Seward. The mail route left the Yukon River at Kaltag or Nulato and continued through Dishkaket to Ophir and Iditarod.

In 1914, Harry Revelle won the winter mail contract to Iditarod and took the first mail from Seward over the Iditarod Trail to Ophir and then south to Iditarod. This service continued through the winter of 1918-19. In 1919, however, the Alaska Railroad was completed to Rex on the north side of the Alaska Range and the mail was again carried along the Yukon to Ruby and then south to Ophir and Iditarod.

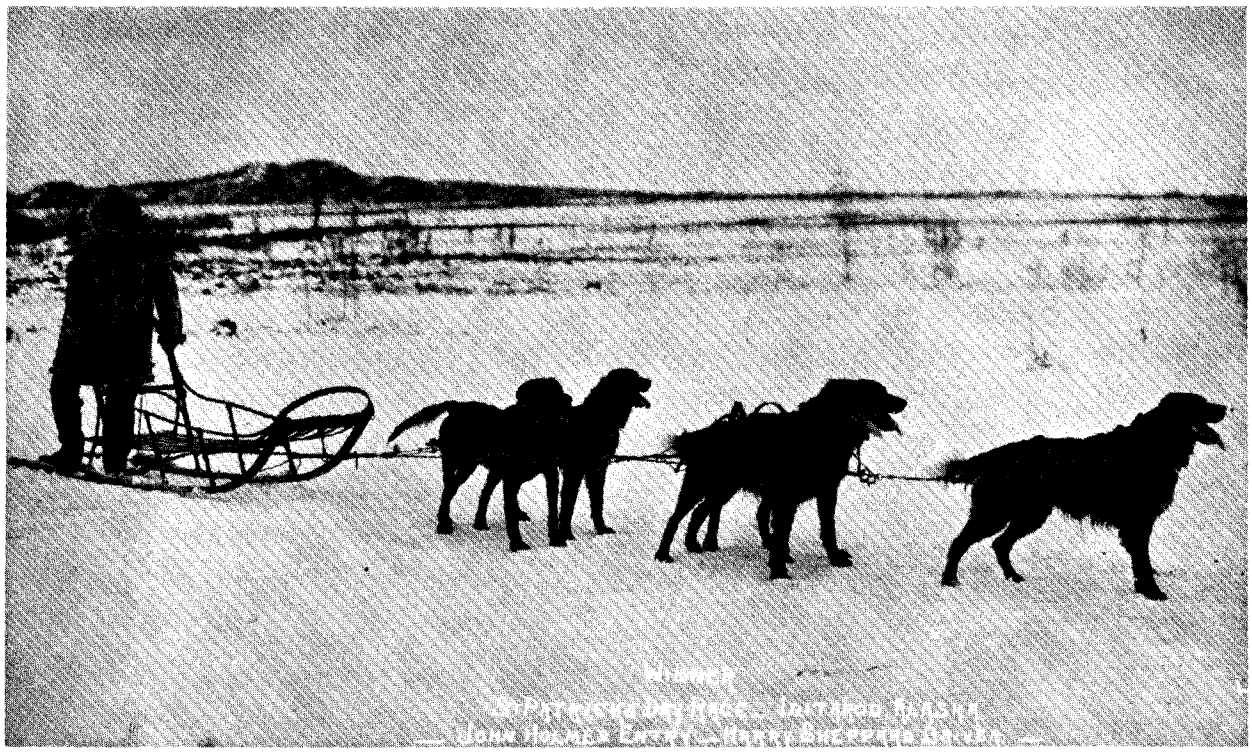
During the winter of 1920-21, the contract was returned to the Iditarod Trail for one final season. Despite cutting a reported 3 weeks off the delivery time to McGrath, the completion of the Alaska Railroad to Fairbanks and the opening of a new trail to McGrath between the Tanana and upper Kuskokwim Rivers marked the end of most use and the rapid abandonment of the Iditarod Trail. After 1914, most of the trails from Kaltag, Nulato, and Lewis on the Yukon to the Ophir and Fairbanks areas were seldom used and were abandoned by 1923. The rise of air mail service in the late twenties eliminated use of most remaining trail segments.

The summer routes between Ruby and Ophir, Ophir and Flat, Sterling Landing (near McGrath) and Takotna and Ophir continued to be improved and are still used today. Winter routes in the McGrath area are also still in use.

Almost all of the early trails along this segment of the route were winter trails used by dog teams, foot travelers, and occasionally by horses. The normal travel season began at the end of October and extended through April. March and early April were the most popular times to travel because of favorable conditions. Most supplies were brought in and gold shipped out by boat. However, in December 1911, Wells Fargo reportedly mushed out nearly one-half million dollars in gold over the trail to Seward. Because of rough terrain and frequent bogs, only a few people are known to have crossed the route under snow-free conditions. Horse-pulled wagons and then motor vehicles hauled supplies and equipment over the road from the river port at Takotna to Ophir and between Iditarod and Flat. A tramway which utilized log rails and a Model "T" Ford automobile also operated between Iditarod and Flat.

Kaltag-Nome

Although the rush to Nome occurred between 1898 and 1900, peak gold production was not reached until 1905 and 1906. It was at this time that the Kaltag-Nome trail began to be used on a regular basis to carry mail from Fairbanks to Nome. Overland mail service continued and the trail was maintained by the Alaska Road Commission until the mid-1920's when aircraft replaced the dogsled for this mail route. Because major sections of this trail utilized the frozen waters of Norton Sound and adjacent lagoons, it was almost exclusively a winter route.



Early Iditarod musher. Photo from Iditarod Trail Annual by Dorothy Page, photo provided by Lillian Carmichael.

Historic Roadhouse along the trail on Seward Peninsula. Photo from Iditarod Trail Annual by Dorothy Page, photo provided by Lillian Carmichael.

This segment was also used by winter travelers to and from various villages around Norton Sound and by local hunters and trappers.

The section between Kaltag and Unalakleet had been used as a portage trail between the Yukon River and Norton Sound for hundreds of years prior to the gold rush. Eskimos from Norton Sound and Athabascans from the Yukon Valley traded over the route. Other sections around Norton Sound were also used, possibly for thousands of years, by Native peoples traveling between camps and villages.

In 1901, a portion of the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) was completed over the Kaltag-Unalakleet section linking Nome and St. Michaels with interior Alaska. The route generally followed the old and new trail alignment and was regularly used for line maintenance by the Army Signal Corps. Soon after 1910, most segments of the trans-Alaska telegraph system were replaced by wireless communication.

Historical Trail Remnants

Highways, the Alaska Railroad, wagon roads, and tractor trails have been superimposed on many old trail segments, especially in the Seward to Susitna area and around Ophir and Iditarod. However, traces of the historic route are still visible in the alpine areas of Indian Creek, Crow, and Rainy Passes. Although very overgrown, sections are also visible in the forested areas between Knik and McGrath because of the relatively slow rate of tree growth in this region. It is not known if remnants exist in the Ophir-Iditarod area or between there and the Yukon River.

From Kaltag to Unalakleet, the historic trail and telegraph route can be observed. Some telegraph wire and a few of the supporting tripods still can be found along the route. The trail from Unalakleet to Nome generally followed the barren shoreline and ice of Norton Sound. Only a few short segments which cut across peninsulas of forest or tundra are still visible. Most of these are still used today by Native people traveling between villages.

Virtually the entire length of the Seward to Nome route was covered at regular intervals by roadhouses (see topographic maps at end of chapter). Every 15 to 30 miles, 1-day's hike or mush, these roadhouses provided food and lodging to mail carriers and other travelers. Even before a new trail was completed, choice roadhouse sites were staked along the route. As Goodwin thrashed his way through virgin territory between the Kuskokwim and Rainy Pass in the winter of 1910-11, the only people he reported seeing were two men selecting sites and putting up roadhouses.

South of the Alaska Range, only the old roadhouse at Skwentna has survived fire, vandalism, firewood gathering, stream bank erosion, and

Rohn River Roadhouse. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

decay which claimed the other roadhouses over the years. North of the Alaska Range, several roadhouses are known to still be standing. The Cape Nome Roadhouse, located 14 miles east of Nome, was built around 1900 and is reported to still be in good condition. At other roadhouse locations, decaying remnants of log structures have been reported. Trapping cabins and lodges have since been built at several of the old roadhouse locations such as Rainy Pass Lodge and Farewell Lake.

Between Kaltag and Unalakleet, some of the old telegraphic relay stations and line cabins are still standing.

Tools, implements, and equipment hauled over the old route undoubtedly were lost or abandoned over the years. Such articles dating back to the late 1890's may still be present along the trails because of the relatively slow rate of oxidation and decomposition due to low precipitation and low mean annual temperatures.

Related Historic Sites

Five historic sites located along or near the Seward to Nome route are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Table III lists these sites, the date they were entered on the Register, and their significance.

In addition to these sites, the townsite of Iditarod has been nominated to the Register. Iditarod is now a ghost town. Only a few buildings now remain where once 600 to 700 people lived. In its heyday, the town had a telephone system, a tramway, two newspapers, four hotels, three lumber companies, a fire hall, nine saloons, a school, and churches.

The nearby mining town of Flat is now nearly deserted. From a peak of 400 people, only a few miners live there; most, seasonally. However, unlike Iditarod, many old structures and mining equipment remain in and around the town.

Historic structures and mining implements also exist in and around Ophir, although their number and condition are not known. No population was reported for Ophir in the 1970 census. However, several small gold mining operations have been reactivated and a number of people are known to be living in the area.

Historical Significance

From the earliest Native trails, based on trade and warfare, up to the present day, the various segments of the Iditarod Trail have been used throughout Alaskan history. River transport evolved from poling boats to luxurious paddle-wheel steamers. Roads and trails were surveyed and constructed. At some places, travelers shifted from railroad car to dog sled. And always there were new routes to pioneer, new

TABLE III. Sites Associated with the Seward to Nome Route Included on the National Register of Historic Places

SITE	DATE ENTERED	SIGNIFICANCE
Hope Historic District	4/25/72	Evidence of gold mining activity on the Kenai Peninsula dating back to 1888.
Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Eklutna	3/24/72	Russian missionary activity associated with fur trading in Cook Inlet dating back to mid-1880's.
Knik	7/23/73	Knik, once the largest community on Cook Inlet, served as regional trading and transportation center from about 1898 to 1917. Includes Knik Museum containing materials dating back to Knik's heyday and "Dog Mushers Hall of Fame" commemorating the long history of dog mushing in Alaska.
Iyatayet Site, Cape Denbigh Peninsula, Norton Sound	10/15/66	One of earliest such sites found, dating back to 6000 B.C., it has given definite sequential evidence of coastal occupation beginning with the Denbigh flint industry. Site has given substance to the assumption that the first people in the Americas came south from Alaska.
Anvil Creek, Nome	10/15/66	Alaska's great gold rush began when the first large gold placer strike was made here on September 20, 1898.

techniques of winter travel to perfect. Even today, the route between Unalakleet and Nome is new every year, a product of the winter ice of Norton Sound.

In a world where primitive land areas have largely disappeared, the Iditarod Trail traverses an isolated and vigorous environment where present-day travelers can duplicate the experiences of their forebearers. A vast and uncompromising land, over large sections unpopulated and far from human development, it requires reversion and adaptation to the conditions of an earlier time by those who would travel it. The words of one Alaskan pioneer, Alfred Brooks, quoted earlier in this report, recall Jefferson's tribute to the men of the frontiers of a still earlier America. Says Brooks, "Many a man who had not developed beyond mediocrity in his own community, tightly bound by tradition and custom, found in Alaska his opportunity and rose to his true level." It is this opportunity to rise to the challenge that gives the Seward-Nome Route National Historic Trail proposal its distinction. Along the course of the trail, old structures and artifacts of Gold Rush times can be found, which heightens the experience of today's adventurer.

None of the various segments of the Seward to Nome route were ever trampled by the rush of thousands of people as were the Chilkoot Pass and White Pass Trails to the Klondike in 1898. Most rushers to the Hope-Sunrise area, the Willow Creek District, the Nome area, the Innoko, and the Iditarod came by steamer. Yet, once in the gold fields, there became a vital need to establish communication and supply lines with the outside world during the long periods when ice and snow sealed off the water arteries. The winter trail system which developed almost from the inception of the original strikes became the lifeline of the mining towns for over 6 months of the year. Even as late as 1925, the importance of the trails was emphasized when a diphtheria epidemic broke out in Nome. Serum was rushed by dog team from Nenana in time to save many lives.

The Iditarod Trail between Seward and the diggings in the Innoko and Iditarod Districts was of particular significance. The Iditarod strike was the last big bonanza in the waning Alaska Gold Rush Era. Total production of placer gold from the Iditarod ranks third, only behind Nome and Fairbanks, among all the mining districts in Alaska. The Innoko ranks fifth. The combined production of these two districts represents more than 9 percent of all placer gold produced in Alaska. In its peak year, 1912, Iditarod produced approximately $3 million in gold or one-fourth of Alaska's total placer production during that year.

Travel up the Yukon, Innoko, and Iditarod Rivers was slow and tedious. Thus, although most of the initial stampeders and later, supplies, arrived by boat, many travelers to the Iditarod country after 1910 preferred overland travel. The trail received publicity in various

magazines stimulating trail travel into Alaska's interior by people from many states and other countries. In this sense, the route had national as well as statewide significance.

In addition to newly arrived persons mushing or walking over the trail after getting off ships in Seward, Whittier, or at the mouth of Ship Creek (Anchorage), hundreds of people engaged in summer mining operations utilized the route semiannually. A large exodus generally followed freeze-up in October when most mining operations terminated. Many over-wintered outside Alaska or in larger Alaskan communities. Prior to break-up in late April or May, the mining towns swelled with returning people.

The importance of the Seward to Nome route is also underscored by the funds expended for construction and maintenance of the various trail segments by the Alaska Road Commission. By 1924, over $175,000 of Territorial and Federal funds had been spent on the major trail segments between Kern Creek and Nome, excluding the substantial investment in the roads between Takotna and Ophir and between Flat and Iditarod. In the early 1900's, this represented a significant portion of the Alaska Road Commission's budget for trails.

The segment between Kaltag and Nome also is of anthropological and archeological significance. Native travelers, who predated the stampeders by perhaps thousands of years, utilized the routes around Norton Sound in their hunting, trapping, and fishing activities, as well as for access to the various camps and Native groups. Archeological sites, such as the one on the Cape Denbigh Peninsula, which could reveal more information about ancient inhabitants of the region and perhaps about the origin of man in North America, undoubtedly exist along the route.

The trail's most important remaining historical resource is its environment. The landscape, climate, and distances that shaped its early use remain. This historic trail--if it remains primitive and demanding in its larger parts--will continue to provide the setting for active involvement in a geography where distance, terrain, and climate are major determinants of people's actions.

PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE TRAIL USES

Present Trail Condition

Only a small fraction of the hundreds of miles of the historic route are currently maintained as trails. The U. S. Forest Service maintains a 4-mile summer hiking trail which generally follows the old trail alignment up to Crow Pass from the Girdwood area. Another 22-mile trail following the branch route up Johnson Creek and down Bench Creek to the Hope-Sunrise area from the railroad is also maintained by the Forest Service, as well as a 5-mile trail along a portion of the Hope-Sunrise route. A 20-mile crude winter trail exists over Indian Creek

Pass and a 4-mile segment up Indian Creek to the Pass has recently been improved for summer use by the State Division of Parks.

The Girl Scouts, under the direction of the State Division of Parks, recently reestablished the historic trail between the Forest Service Crow Pass Trail and the end of the road leading up the Eagle River valley. This 21-mile recreation trail located within Chugach State Park is now maintained by the Division of Parks.

Other segments, although not publicly maintained, continue, through use, to be passable winter trails. These include segments in the McGrath-Takotna area, between villages along Norton Sound, between Kaltag and Unalakleet, and between Knik and Susitna. In the past several years, the State Deparment of Highways has provided local villages with money and materials for flagging and marking trails between the various villages from Kaltag to Nome. Many of these routes follow the historic Kaltag-Nome Trail. Because of changing snow and ice conditions, windfalls, and brush growth, these trails can vary in location by as much as a mile or two from year to year. Unless well traveled, breaking trail along these routes by foot, dog team, or snow-machine can be a grueling ordeal.

The summer trails developed in the early 1920's between Ophir and Flat and between Poorman and Ophir are believed to be utilized occasionally by vehicles primarily involved in mining operations.

The segment over Rainy Pass through the Alaska Range is still visible in places, although badly overgrown by brush and altered by snow and rock slides in places. This segment is passable, although difficult, in summer and winter. A jeep road and summer trail is also utilized over a part of the old Portage Glacier route from Whittier to the pass area overlooking the glacier.

Most of the remaining segments are either not readily locatable or are too altered or overgrown to permit travel. Except for those segments over mountain passes, virtually all remaining portions of the route are ill suited for summer travel. As the historic trails made ample use of frozen lakes, rivers, muskegs, and marshes, summer trail conditions are extremely poor if not impassable. Additionally, the winter snow conceals an extremely rough ground surface, in most places due to stumps, fallen trees, low brush, frost-heaved hummocks and tussocks, and other obstacles.

Several segments of the old trail route are easily traversed and continue to be maintained as roads and railroads. Gravel roads now connect Nome and Solomon, Flat and Iditarod, Ophir and Takotna and Sterling Landing, and Poorman and Ruby. Highways overlay several old segments between Seward and Knik with extensions to Sunrise and Hope and up the Eagle River valley and Crow Creek valley for several miles. The Alaska Railroad follows the route alignment between Seward and Kern Creek and by tunnel under the Portage Glacier pass from Whittier.

Cross-country skier near Indian Creek Pass in Chugach State Park. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

Scenic and Recreational Qualities

Portions of the major route and branch segments on the Kenai Peninsula and in the Anchorage area are highly scenic and accessible in both summer and winter. The route often parallels swift streams through deep mountain valleys. In a matter of hours, a range of ecosystems and even seasons can be experienced as one proceeds from the dense spruce forests of river valleys, to the small poplar groves on the hillsides, to the alpine tundra above, and finally to the rock rubble, snow fields, and glaciers on mountain peaks. The proximity of the Anchorage urban area and the easy access by road and railroad give this 250+ mile segment of the route high recreational value for day and weekend use. The presence of some developed trails and recreational facilities along this segment further increase its recreational attractiveness.

Beyond Knik, many different recreational qualities are encountered. Access from the state highway net is not available and most of the land is uninhabited. Over much of the distance, a wilderness environment exists. The recreational values associated with wilderness are quite rare nationally, although more common in Alaska.

Offsetting these special wilderness recreational qualities are, of course, the inherent problems of access to and travel through large stretches of primitive country. Access is only available by commercial and/or charter aircraft. Summer overland travel along most of this route is nearly impossible. Thickets, windfalls, tussocks, muskegs, lakes, mosquitoes, and other obstacles continually impede travel, especially across the vast low valleys of the Susitna, Kuskokwim, and Innoko valleys. The route through Rainy Pass is an exception to these general conditions because of the continuous high terrain and predominant alpine vegetation.

Winter offers far superior travel conditions although the severe cold, deep snow, and long distances severely limit recreational use to only the very hardy. An added benefit of the long winter is the absence of the mosquito. The presence of this insect cannot be overrated in describing the adversities of summer travel, especially in lowland areas.

The environment traversed between Knik and Unalakleet offers a primitive beauty. Plant and animal communities are, for the most part, in their natural state and nature study and photographic opportunities abound. The presence or absence of streams, bogs, permafrost, slopes, and other features create a continuous mosaic. While vegetation provides a degree of scenic diversity, the topography over large segments of the route is fairly uniform. The extensive rolling to flat lowlands provide few scenic vistas and long distance travel can become monotonous.

The mountainous areas along the route are exceptions to this uniformity. From the southern flank of the Alaska Range, magnificent views of Mt.

McKinley can be observed to the north across the broad Susitna River valley. The section through the Alaska Range over Rainy Pass possesses outstanding scenic values. The sections through the Kuskokwim and Kaltag Mountains also have exceptional scenic qualities. The Unalakleet River has been proposed as a National Wild River area and would include much of the trail route between Kaltag and Unalakleet. The high scenic and recreational qualities identified in this river area would also be associated with the trail section.

The character of the route segment along the shoreline of Norton Sound varies more between winter and summer than along any other route segment. In winter, when continuous trail travel may be possible, a treeless landscape/seascape, swept by blowing snow, affords a bleak recreation picture. With summer, the scene transforms dramatically. As the Bering Sea ice recedes, sea mammals are seen offshore, salmon make their way up streams by the thousands, the tundra comes alive with flowers and berries, and blues and greens replace white as dominant colors. At the same time, the melting of snow and ice means the destruction of the trail. Where frozen lagoons and sea ice were used to bridge barrier dunes and spits, only open water remains.

Recreational Uses

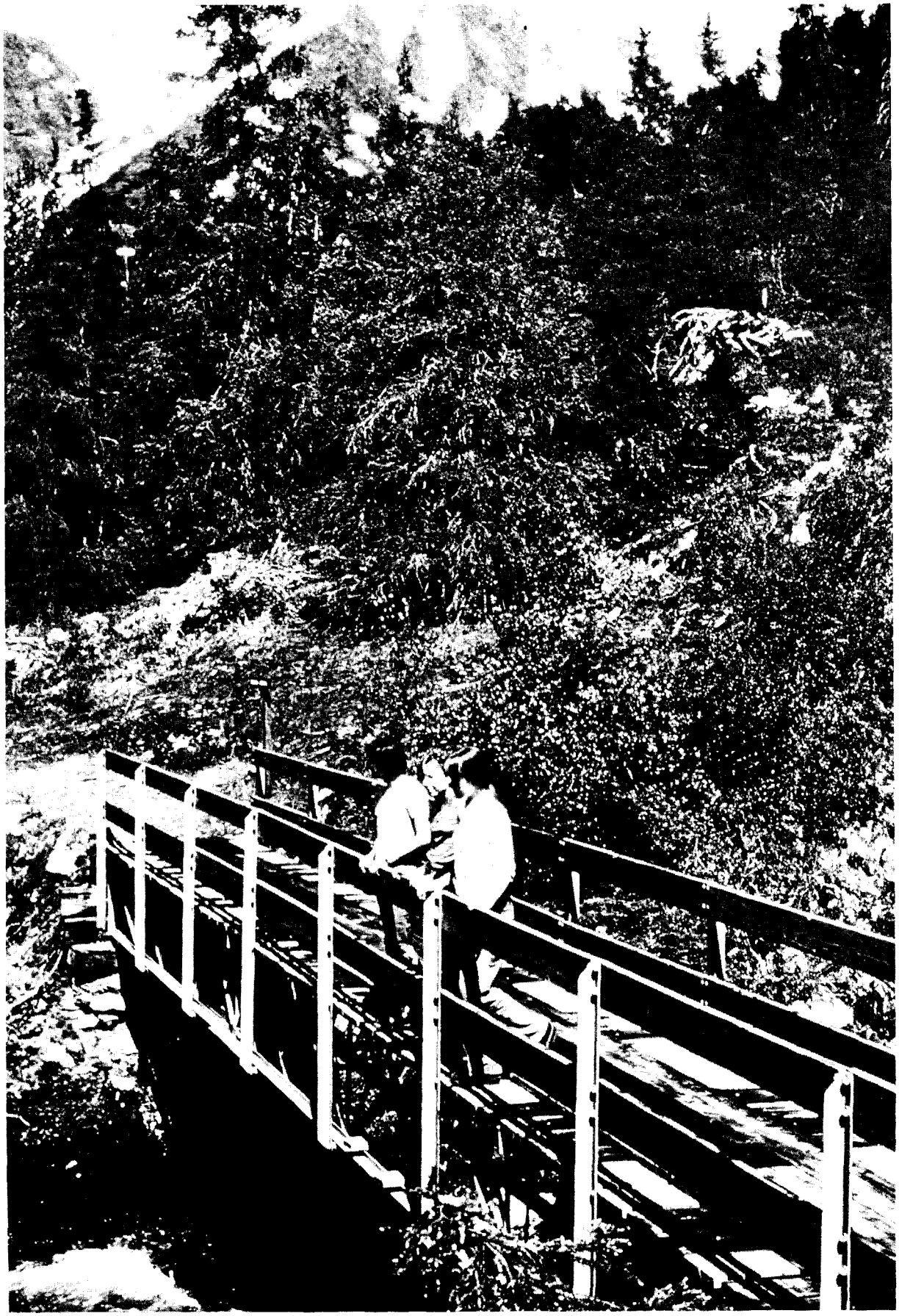
Most current recreational use of the route occurs in the Seward-Susitna region. Between Seward and Girdwood and between Eagle River and Knik, much of this use is in the form of driving for pleasure, picnicking, and sightseeing. A highway and railroad cover much of these segments.

The Forest Service recreational trails up to Crow Pass and across Johnson Pass receive heavy summer use by hikers. Two public use cabins on these trails are reserved most days of the summer. Summer use of the Crow Pass trail is estimated at 300 persons per week, while 50 persons per week are estimated to use the Johnson Pass Trail. The 22-mile Johnson Pass Trail also receives winter use by snowmachiners and cross-country skiers. Unfortunately, an avalanche destroyed the public cabin at Bench Lake during March 1975.

The section from Crow Pass down to Eagle River (approximately 21 miles) also receives summer hiking use. The completion of a hiking trail during the summer of 1975 has increased use. The Eagle River valley is also used heavily in the winter by cross-country skiers and snowmachiners.

The 20-mile Indian Creek Pass section between Anchorage and Indian Creek is traversed annually by cross-country skiers. The improved trail up Indian Creek to the pass also attracts summer hiking use.

Between Knik and Susitna, the many trails also receive winter use by dog mushers, snowmobilers, and cross-country skiers. Most of this use,



Hikers along Johnson Pass Trail in Chugach National Forest.
(U.S. Forest Service)

however, takes place within 10 to 12 miles of Knik. Some summer hiking use of the Iditarod Trail occurs up to 4 miles from Knik.

A jeep road and trail from Whittier up through Portage Pass also receives summer hiking and recreational vehicle use.

Hiking, fishing, hunting, recreational gold panning, and berry picking are popular summer and fall activities all along the road system in this area. Similarly, cross-country skiing and snowmachine use occur over much of the route in the winter where the highway or railroad provide access to adjacent day-use areas. An annual train trip sponsored by the local ski club brings hundreds of cross-country skiers into the Grandview area along the trail, 50 miles north of Seward.

Beyond the Susitna River, recreation use is primarily non-trail oriented. Fly-in fishing and hunting are the principal activities. This use is not very extensive or intensive at the present time. Hiking and wilderness guiding takes place across Rainy Pass, although the level of this use is believed to be low. Light recreational hunting, fishing, and travel around the several towns and villages along the route probably occurs, although most such activity is geared to a subsistence lifestyle. Winter recreational use is even lighter. Some recreational snowmachine use and cross-country skiing probably occurs in the vicinity of Nome, McGrath, and west of the Susitna River.

Each March since 1973, approximately 40 mushers and 400 dogs traverse major portions of the Iditarod Trail as part of the Anchorage to Nome sled dog race, although only about half the entrants reach Nome. The sled dog race follows the route closely except between Ophir and Kaltag and through the Alaska Range. Instead of cutting directly across the Innoko valley to Kaltag, the race route follows the summer trail north from Ophir to Poorman and then the road to Ruby. Between Ruby and Kaltag, the Yukon River is utilized. This route was selected because it passes through several Native villages where dog mushing used to be extremely popular and important before the days of the snowmachine. With the new interest in dog racing developing in Alaska and the excitement generated by the Iditarod Trail Race, dogs have again returned to the Yukon villages.

Recreation use in the area of the Seward-Knik segment is expected to increase. Hiking, cross-country skiing, and off-road vehicle use will gain in popularity as the population in southcentral Alaska expands. Should such use lead to additional major trail developments or other environmental impacts, the appropriate managing agency or agencies will prepare the necessary environmental impact statements covering the actions.

Although the largest increases in use can be expected in areas closest to Anchorage, recreation use, both summer and winter, will increase moderately north of Knik and Susitna and in the Rainy Pass area as

Hiker and rock cairn along the Iditarod Trail near Crow Pass in Chugach State Park.
(Alaska State Division of Parks)

A musher in the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race nears the Rohn River checkpoint in the Alaska Range. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

people travel farther to seek quality hunting, fishing, hiking, and other recreation areas. No meaningful estimate of future use is possible at this time.

The possible creation of a new National Forest, National Wildlife Refuge, or National Wild River would also attract more people to various segments of the route. Future plans by the State Division of Parks call for increased development of existing trails within Chugach State Park. Proposed trailhead developments and trail extensions along the lower Eagle River and from Indian Creek down Ship Creek to the Arctic Valley road area will also increase recreational use along the historic routes.

Nonrecreational Uses

The trail involves the existing Seward, Glenn, Parks, and the Nome-Council Highways. The highways and roads in the Anchorage area are used primarily for transportation. Similarly, the roads between Nome and Solomon, Ophir and Sterling Landing, and Poorman and Ruby are used primarily for basic transportation and the hauling of goods from points of transfer to towns and mining operations. The Western Access Road is proposed along portions of the trail corridor.

Some portions of the old trail are similarly used as basic transportation corridors. Winter trails between villages on Norton Sound, between Unalakleet and Kaltag, along the Yukon, and in the McGrath area are frequently used by local residents on snowmachines to reach other settlements, hunting areas, or trap lines. Subsistence hunting, fishing, trapping, and other activities also take place along the route around villages. Much of this use is by snowmachine and to a lesser extent by dog teams. Firewood gathering and the cutting of house logs is also probably occurring along the route near villages.

Mining continues at a number of locations along the route including Nome, Ungalik, Cape Nome, Flat, Ruby, Lime Hills, Steelmute/Barometer, and Iditarod. It is not known if such mining activities actually occur immediately adjacent to major trail alignments.

In the Seward-Knik area, residential and commercial uses are infringing on portions of the old trails. Some of the old trail between Knik and Susitna is known to cross private homesteads and other property. Similarly, the towns around the Anchorage area overlie portions of the old route.

Future selections of public domain lands by Natives and the State could result in additional nonrecreational uses of lands along the route. Resource development by the State and Native groups is expected.

The planning map developed by the State Department of Highways in July 1973 shows proposed extensions of the transportation system covering much of the historic route. Surface transportation corridors are

proposed from Knik to McGrath through Rainy Pass, from Ophir to Poorman, from McGrath to Flat, and from Fairbanks to Nome via Ruby, Kaltag, Unalakleet, and around Norton Sound. Several dam proposals along the Yukon would inundate portions of the route.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Qualifications for National Scenic Trail Designation

The criteria used in evaluating the Seward-Nome route are as follows:

Criterion: Because of their special characteristics, National Scenic Trails should be nationally significant and be capable of attracting visitors from throughout the United States.

Finding: The Seward-Nome Route (Iditarod Trail) is of national significance because of the prominent role it played in the Alaska Gold Rush Era. Not only are its historic values of outstanding importance, but it traverses some of Alaska's most scenic terrain and areas of high recreational value. Presently, except for the sled dog race, the Seward-Nome Route is attracting little more than local visitation. However, much of the route has important scenic and recreational appeal and visitation from beyond the local area can be expected to increase.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails are designed for hiking and other compatible uses. The National Trails System Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment on these trails, except in certain circumstances.

Finding: The Seward-Nome route is primarily a winter-use trail and one of the main means of use is the snowmachine. Portions of the trail are adaptable to and are being used for hiking, skiing, and other compatible forms of recreation, but these portions comprise only a minor amount of the total length of routes or trails involved.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails of historical importance should adhere as accurately as possible to their principal historic routes.

Finding: Except for short portions of the Iditarod sled dog race trail, the Seward-Nome route follows the historic trails used during the Gold Rush Era.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be provided with adequate public access through connecting local or regional trails. Access should be located at reasonable intervals to provide for trips of various lengths.

Finding: The widespread use of the airplane in Alaska opens up to use virtually all portions of the Seward-Nome route, regardless

of the season of use. Only the Seward-Knik leg is readily accessible by the more conventional means of road or railway.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be primarily land based.

Finding: The Seward-Nome route primarily crosses land areas, although significant portions of the route follow rivers or cross lakes, muskegs and marshes, and Norton Sound. Main use of the watered segments, however, occurs in winter when they are frozen over.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be of sufficient length to encompass and provide appropriate access to the resources which are a basis for the trail's designation.

Finding: The Seward-Nome route includes an aggregate of 2,037 miles of trail.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be continuous except where no practicable or feasible interconnection exists.

Finding: During winter, the principal season of use, the Seward-Nome route is continuous. In summer, water disconnects many segments, especially Norton Sound on the Kaltag-Nome leg.

Conclusions

The historic and recreational resources of the Seward-Nome route are found to be nationally significant and merit national recognition.

The rush to the Iditarod gold fields represented the last great gold stampede in North America. From all over the United States and even other countries, men and women traveled incredible distances to Alaska and then over wilderness trails to the gold fields. The Seward-Nome route forms a significant part of Alaska's and the Nation's frontier heritage.

The route is exceptional in that it was and is principally a winter route. Historic travel along the route took the path of least resistance, utilizing snow and ice to cross estuaries, lakes, rivers, marshes, windfalls, hummocky terrain, and other obstacles along much of the route. Due to these obstacles, summer travel was and is extremely difficult, if not impossible, over many segments.

The route is unique in that it is the only major trail system still used by dog mushers. The Iditarod Trail Race has been held annually since 1973 over a 1,049-mile segment from Anchorage to Nome. It commemorates dogsled travel as a unique aspect of Alaskan history. This race has, in a few years, become a major Alaskan spectator event and has attracted national publicity. The race route deviates substantially in places from the main Seward-Nome route, but utilizes other historic travel routes.

Several portions of the route possess high recreational values. The segments near Anchorage over Crow Pass, Indian Creek Pass, the Bench Lake Trail, and the segment west of Knik are currently receiving hiking, cross-country skiing, dog mushing, and/or snowmachine use. The Rainy Pass segment and the Portage Pass area have excellent potential for hiking use although existing uses are relatively light.

Snowmachines are used over major portions of the historic route for transportation, subsistence activities, and recreational purposes, including breaking trail for the sled dog race.

Some segments receiving recreational use or having potential for recreational use or development may be degraded or lost from public ownership or use through land disposal or by conflicting land uses over the next several years unless formal dedication or designation of land along the route occurs.

Most of the route is currently in public ownership with the State of Alaska controlling the largest share of the total mileage. Approximately 300 miles of the route have been selected by Native corporations under the terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Based upon a knowledge of the area and the Iditarod Trail's historic role, the trail appears to possess national historic significance. Key sites, structures, and objects dating from this historic period must be identified and preserved before they are lost forever.

Together, the historical environment, the complementing assemblage of historic sites and structures, and continuing uses reminiscent of historic ones along the Iditarod Trail form a resource of national significance.

Recommendations

The entire Seward-Nome route--including appropriate branch, alternate, and Iditarod sled dog race routes--and related sites should be designated as a National Historic Trail within the National Trails System. The importance of its role in Alaskan history and the remaining historical values and growing public interest and use support this action. The designated route should include the frozen surfaces of those estuaries, lakes, and rivers, such as the Yukon, that are overlain by the route as well as roadways and railroads that overlay the route. The legislation designating the trail should include provisions for acquisition, retention, or dedication of significant historic sites, and for a right-of-way or easement along most or all of the route to protect historic values and segments for potential future recreational trail development and to insure continued public travel along the various segments.

Because construction of a summer trail over much of the route would be extremely expensive and impractical due to the great distances involved and the remoteness from population centers, it should not be attempted at this time. However, selected segments could be developed for summer use if the demand warrants such action.

Customary existing off-road vehicle use along the various segments should continue to be permitted. The manager of a particular segment should carefully regulate off-road vehicular use in order to protect environmental values and prevent conflicts among trail users.

As recreation needs increase in Alaska, consideration should be given to signing, improvement, and/or extension of existing public recreational trails along the route. Historic preservation law requires that the land areas affected by trail designation be surveyed for cultural resources so that a knowledge of these resources and requirements for their preservation may govern planning. A careful study of the route's archeological, historical, and recreational resources; development of an overall management and protection plan for the route; and stabilization of significant historic buildings or sites along the route should be undertaken during the initial planning following designation. Some historic sites, buildings, implements, and other resources found along the route will be imperiled over the next several years unless protected by some coordinated management program.

Inclusion of the route and related sites on the National Register of Historic Places should continue to be pursued by the Bureau of Land Management and the State.

The Bureau of Land Management should be designated as the overall Federal administrator to coordinate planning and actions to be taken along the entire route, and to manage those segments located on public domain lands. The various State and Federal, and possibly local, agencies should manage those segments traversing lands under their ownership or charge. Those route segments protected by public easements through private lands should be managed by the public agency having paramount land management responsibility in the area.

COSTS

During the foreseeable future, most use of the various trail segments would continue to be in winter when the trails are frozen over and covered with snow. Therefore, little or no conventional trail development or maintenance would be required. None is proposed on Federal lands at this time.

The only acquisition proposed is for a 25-foot wide, 1-1/2-mile long corridor in the Knik area which is now in private ownership. Such acquisition is needed to insure availability of a continuous trail for public use along this segment of the historic route. Otherwise,

virtually the entire route is already in public ownership. The cost of acquiring the approximately 5 acres involved is estimated to be $35,000.

Another cost which the Federal government should incur would be to uniformly mark the trail with signs at approximately 25 highway crossings and other key points. The cost is estimated to be $2,500.

The major Federal cost would be to determine the precise location of the various trails and to locate and inventory the condition of the historic sites and structures along the trails. The cost of such a study by the Bureau of Land Management is estimated to be $100,000.

Responsibilities of the land management agencies for identification, preservation, and protection of National Register caliber properties are not affected by this proposal. These responsibilities stem from the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and E.O. 11593 of April 1971. However, it can be assumed that historic resources associated with the National Historic Trail would be highlighted by designation and that coordinating and preservation/protection programs would be emphasized by the managing agencies. Therefore, indirectly, the National Historic Trail designation could result in increased preservation activities along the trail.

Future management of those segments of the trail adaptable to summer recreation use would be the responsibility of the political jurisdiction involved. Most use would be on non-Federal lands in the Anchorage area. The Governor and State Legislature both have endorsed this concept and recommendations. The need for additional trail development for summer use on Federal lands is minimal at this time and would not be undertaken until a sufficient demand materializes and studies of appropriate segments have been completed.

Overall management coordination of the route by the Bureau of Land Management would most likely involve the assignment of one person full time at an estimated cost of approximately $50,000 annually.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation has determined that the proposed action would not result in a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the natural and human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act. Principal use of the trail will occur during the winter months when the trail is covered with snow and ice. Little use in addition to what is already occurring is expected because of the extreme rigors involved along the trail during the primary season of use. Therefore, in accord with the applicable Council on Environmental Quality Guidelines, a Negative Declaration has been prepared. An Environmental Assessment is filed with the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation to support this Negative Declaration.

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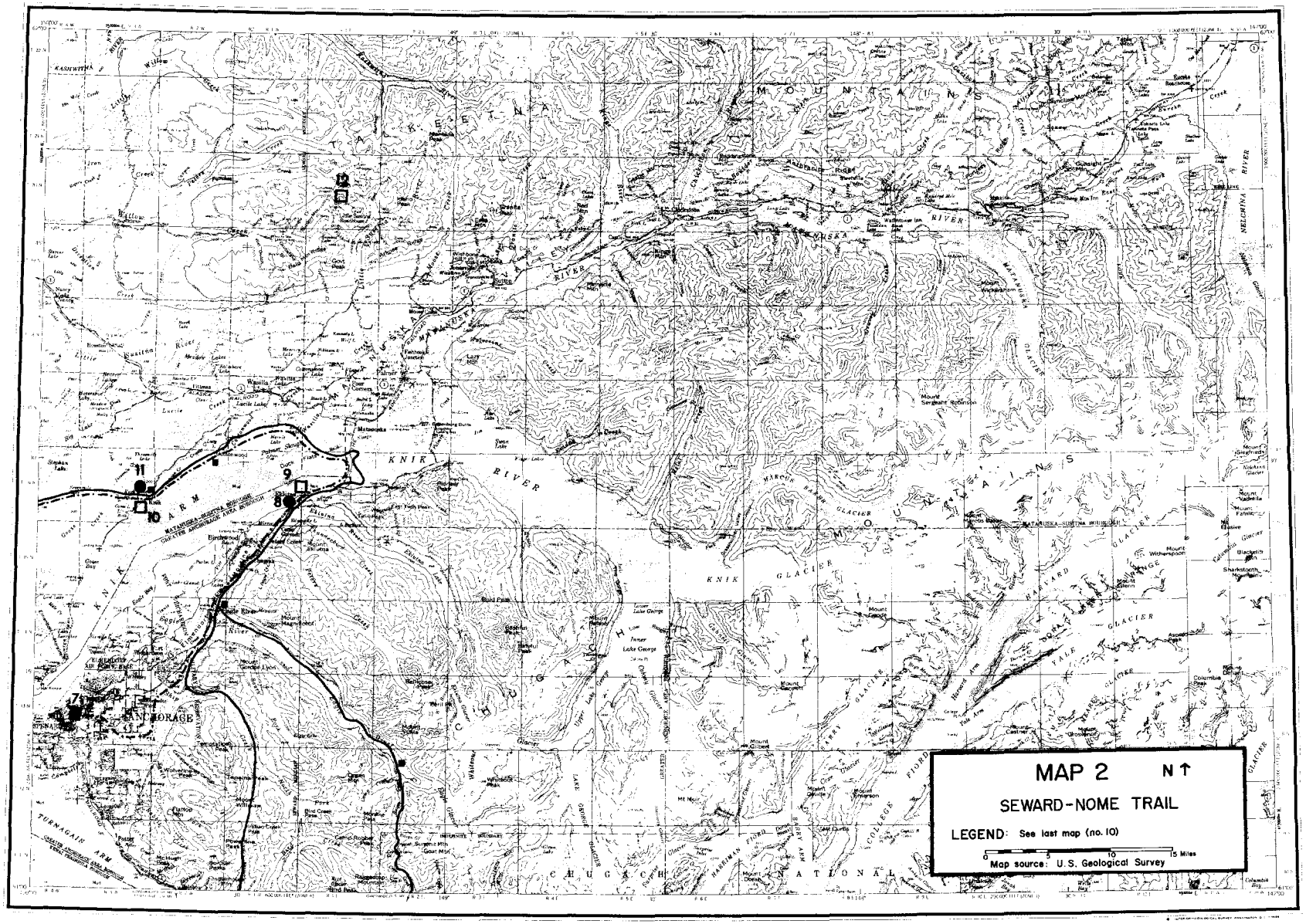
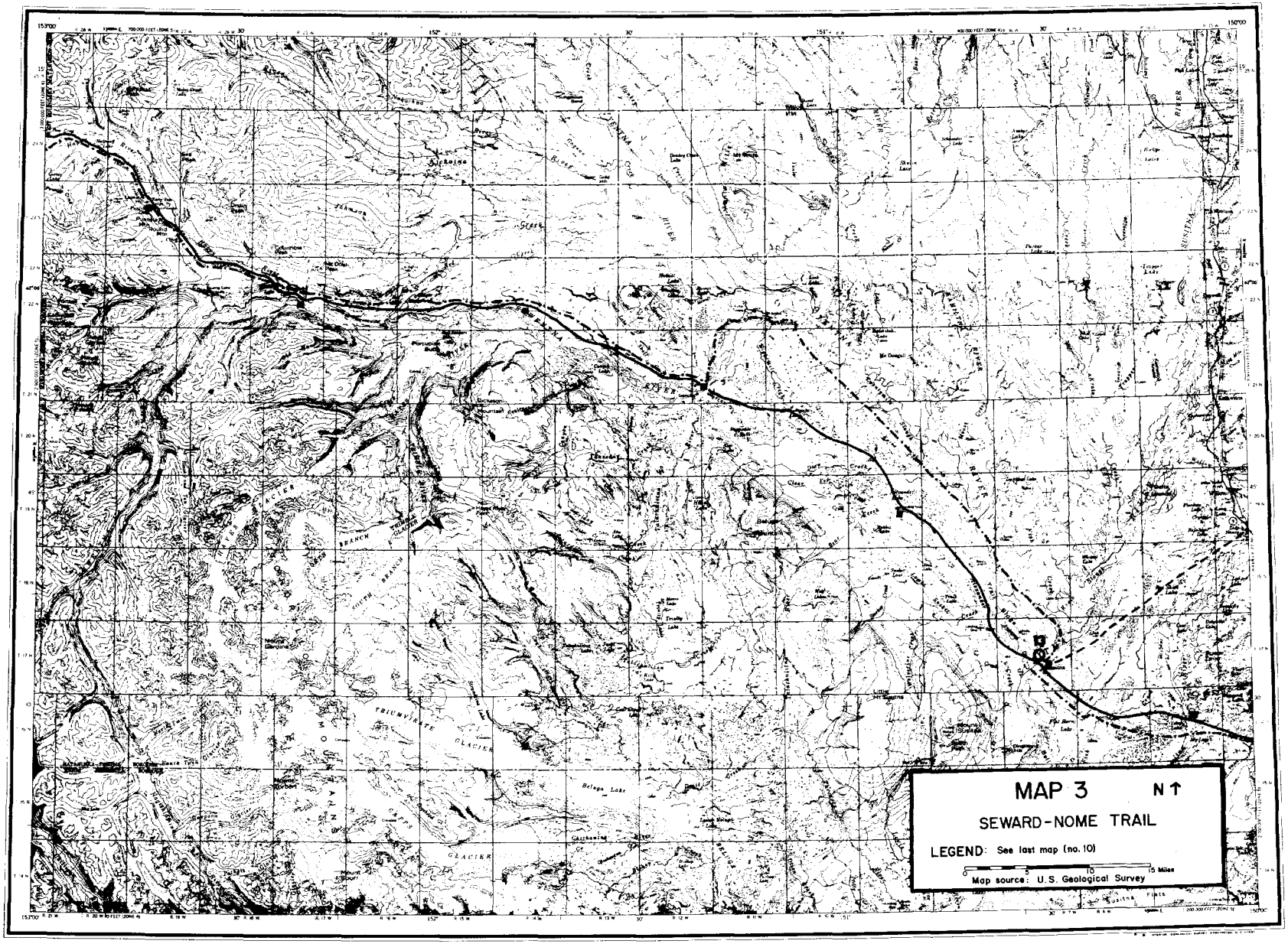

MAP 2
N↑
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
TALKEETNA MOUNTAINS
KNIK RIVER
KNIK GLACIER
MATANUSKA RIVER
NELCHINA RIVER
ANCHORAGE
TURNAGAIN ARM
KNIK ARM
CHUGACH NATIONAL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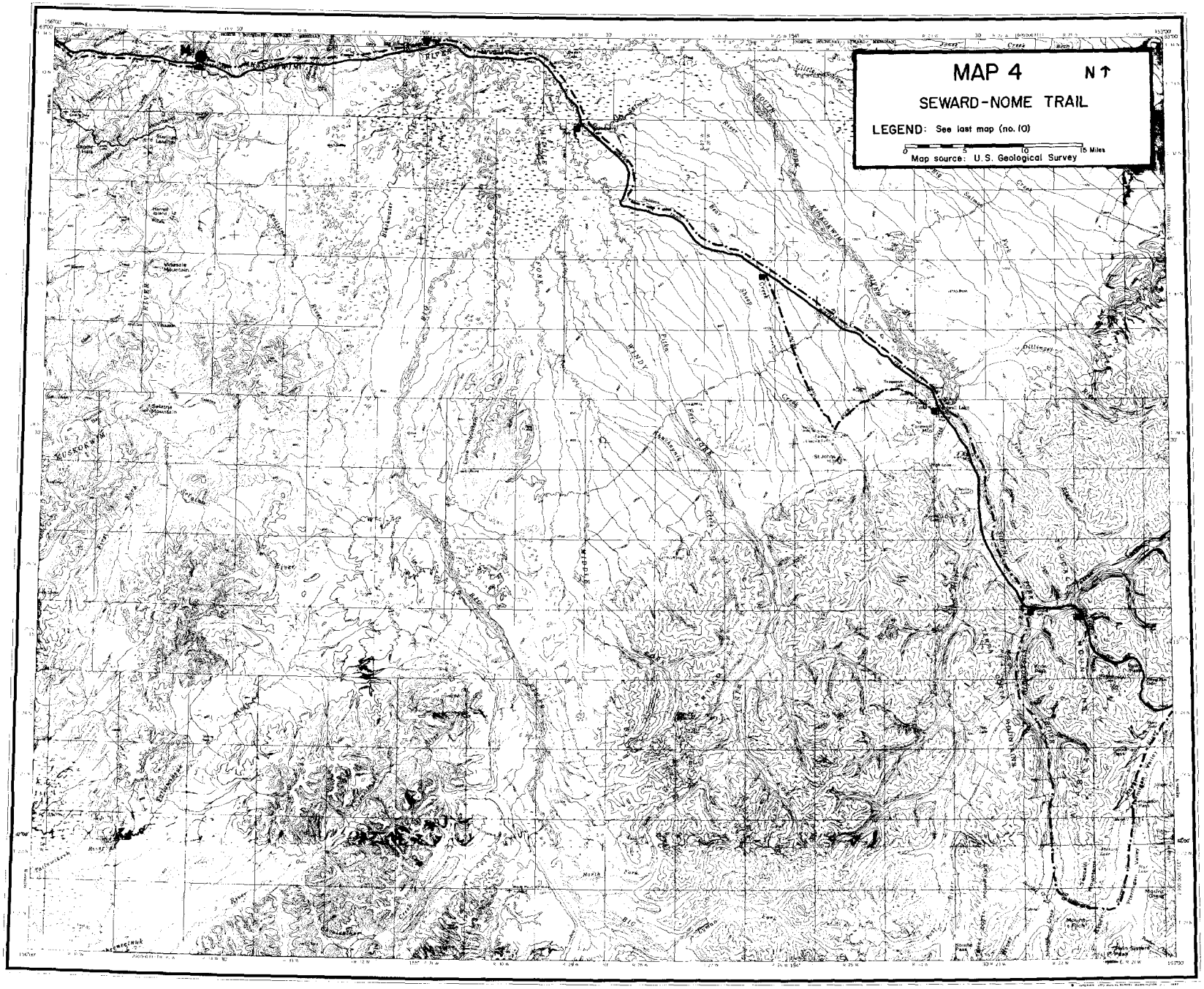
N↑
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey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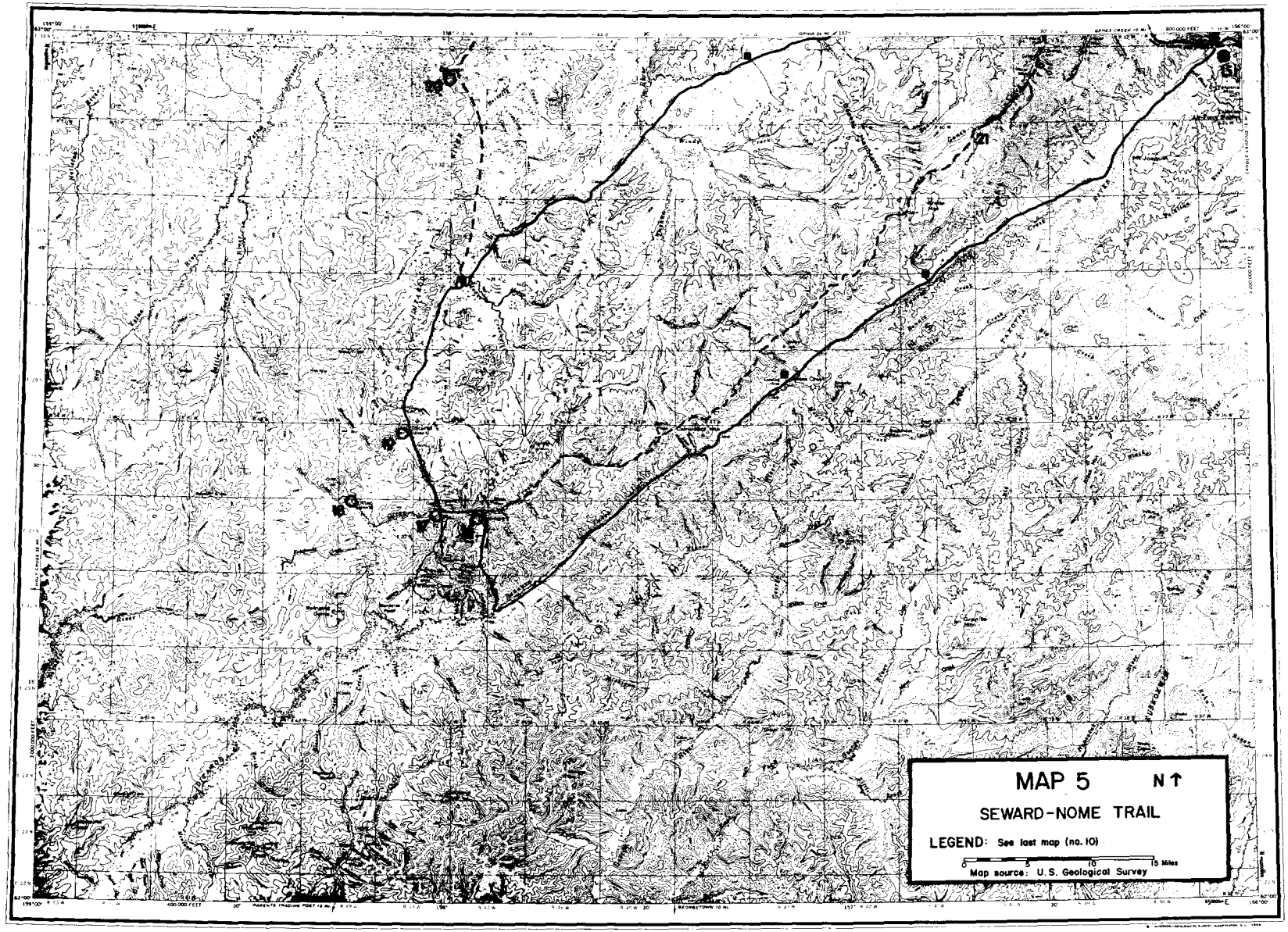
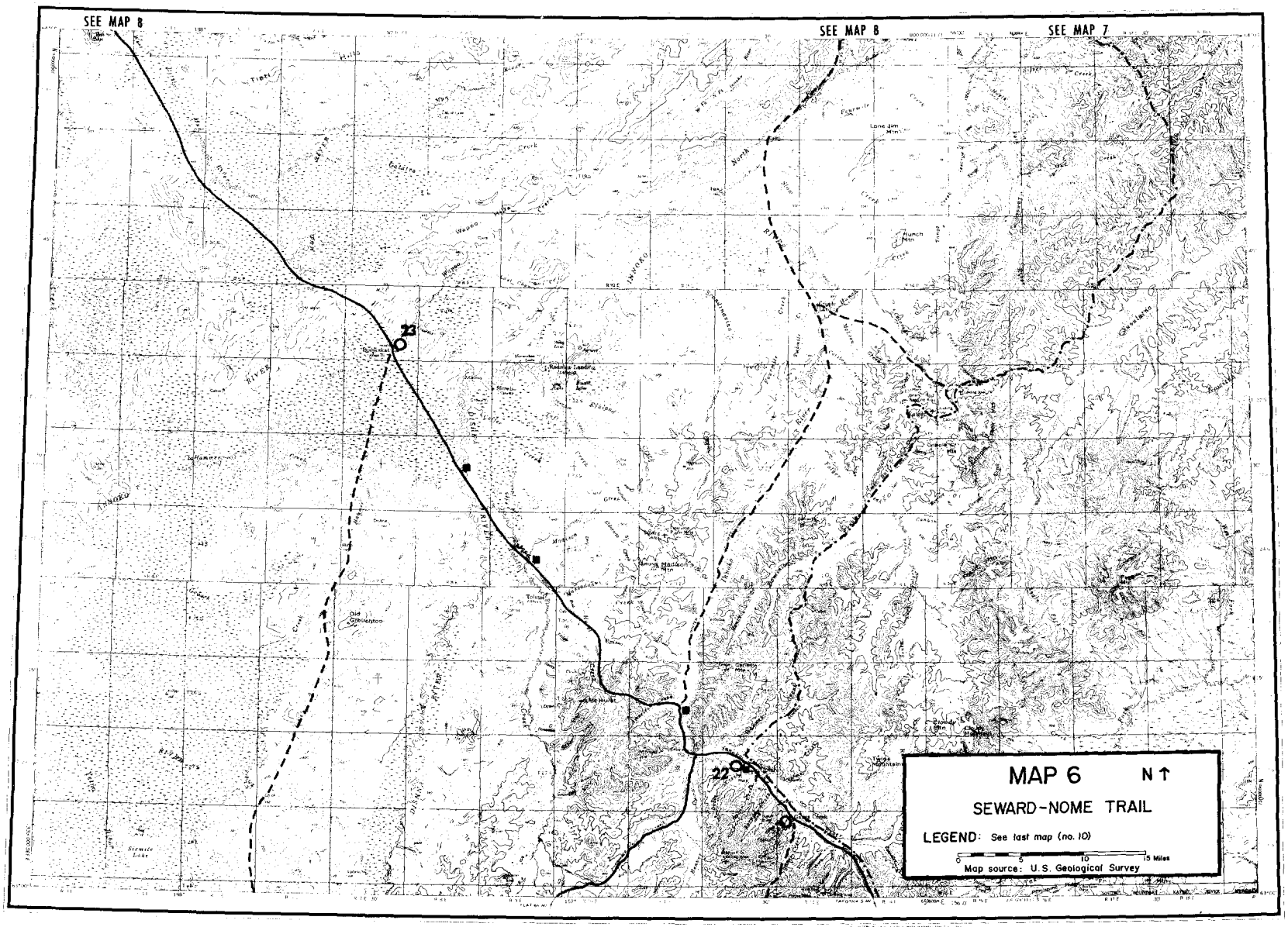
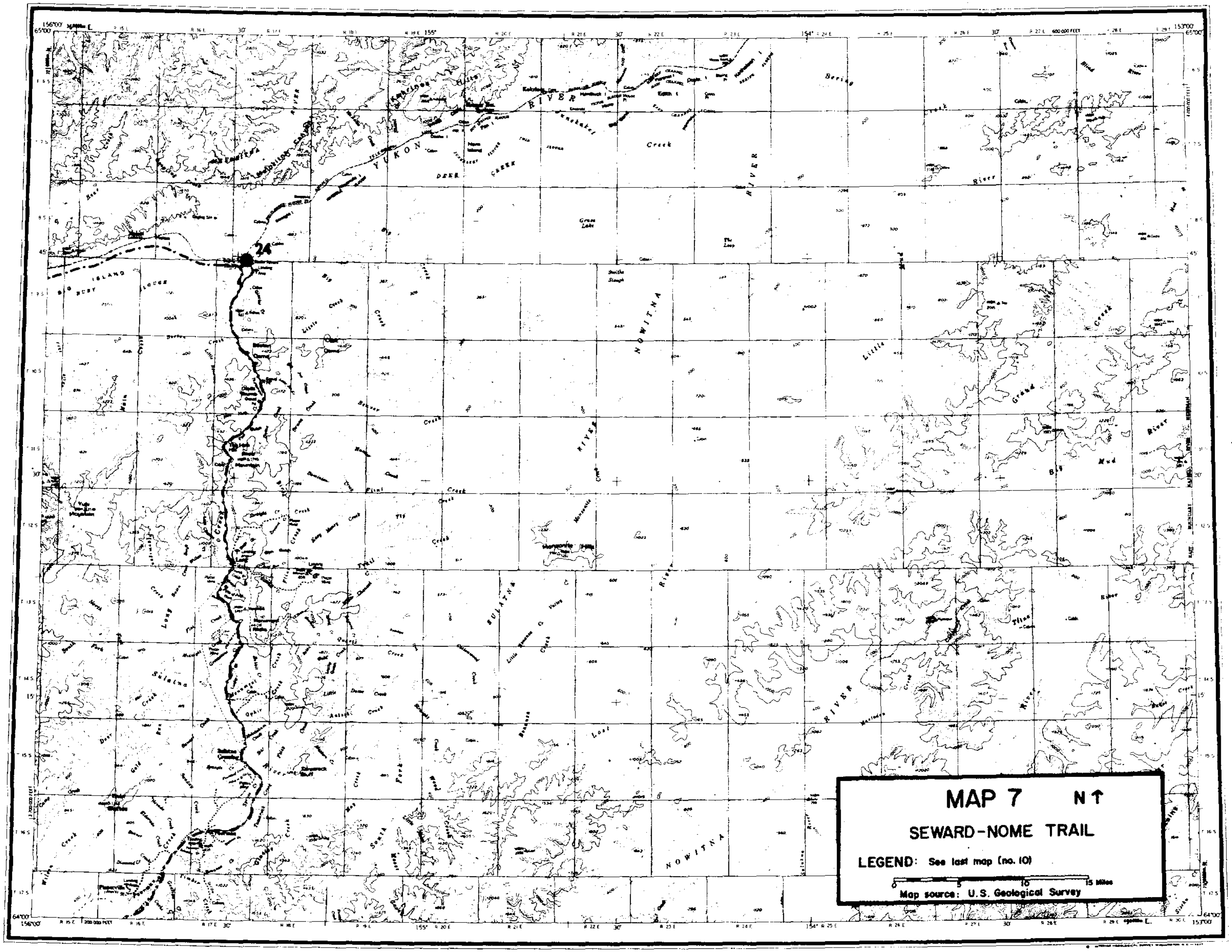
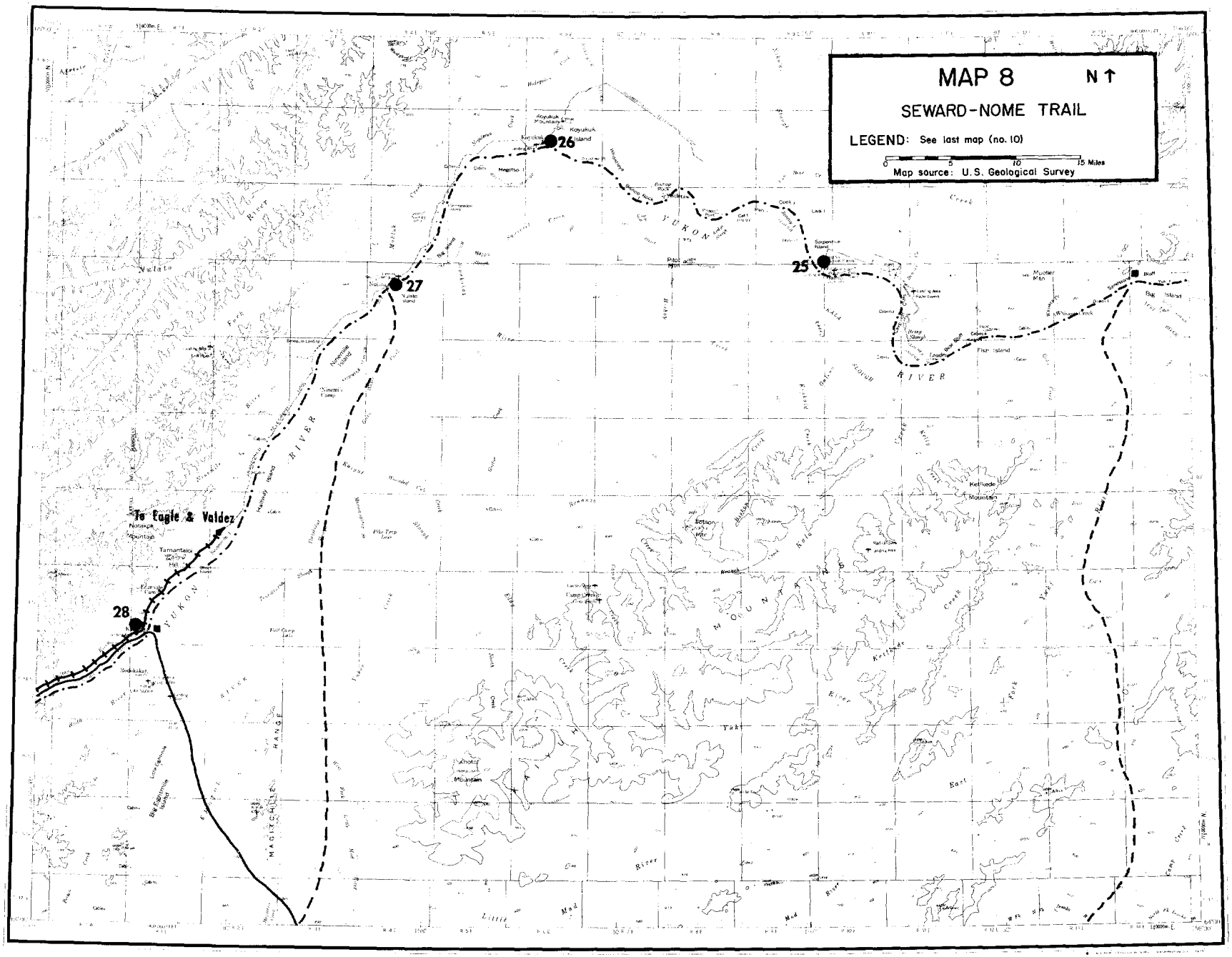
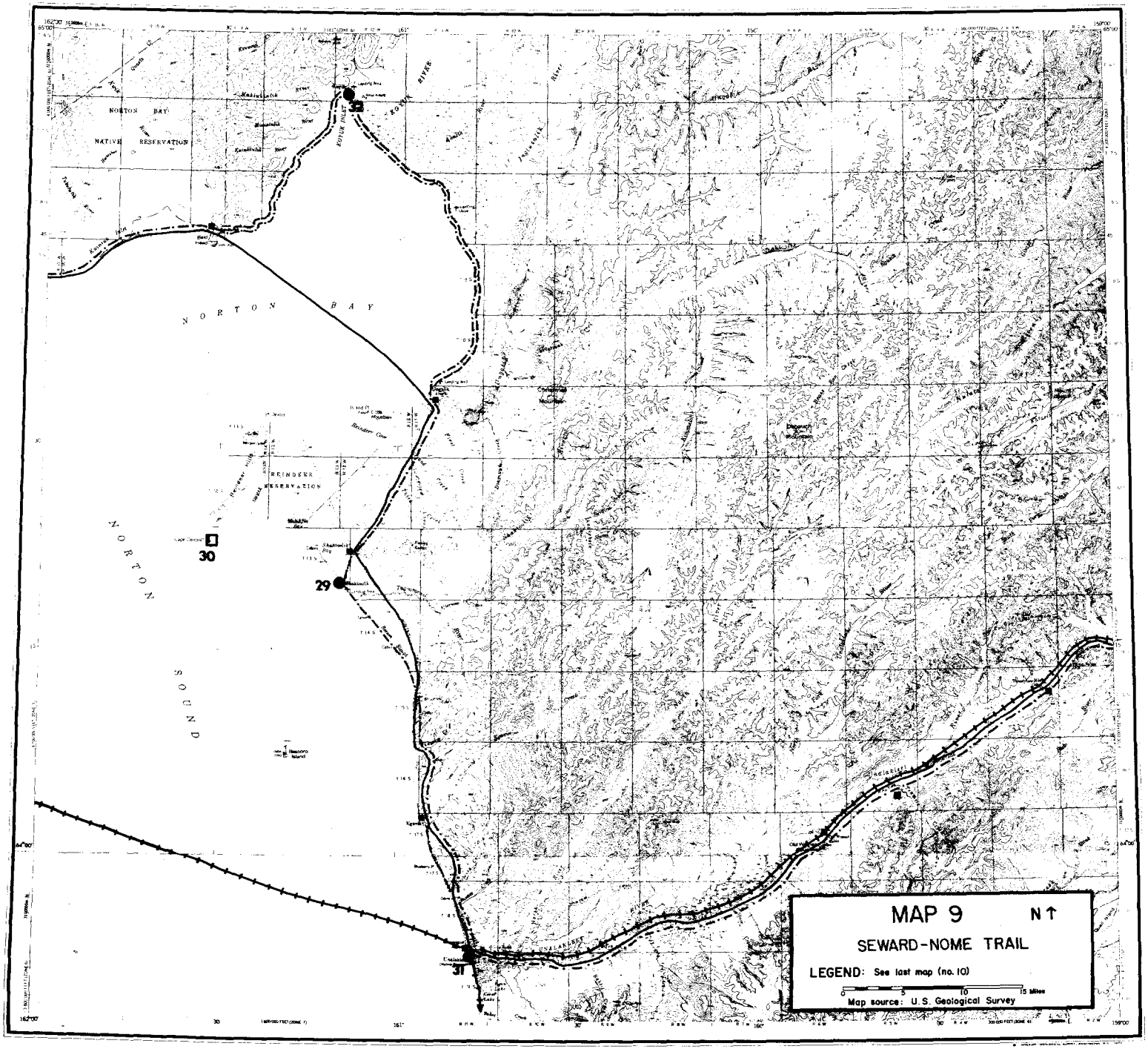
N↑
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey

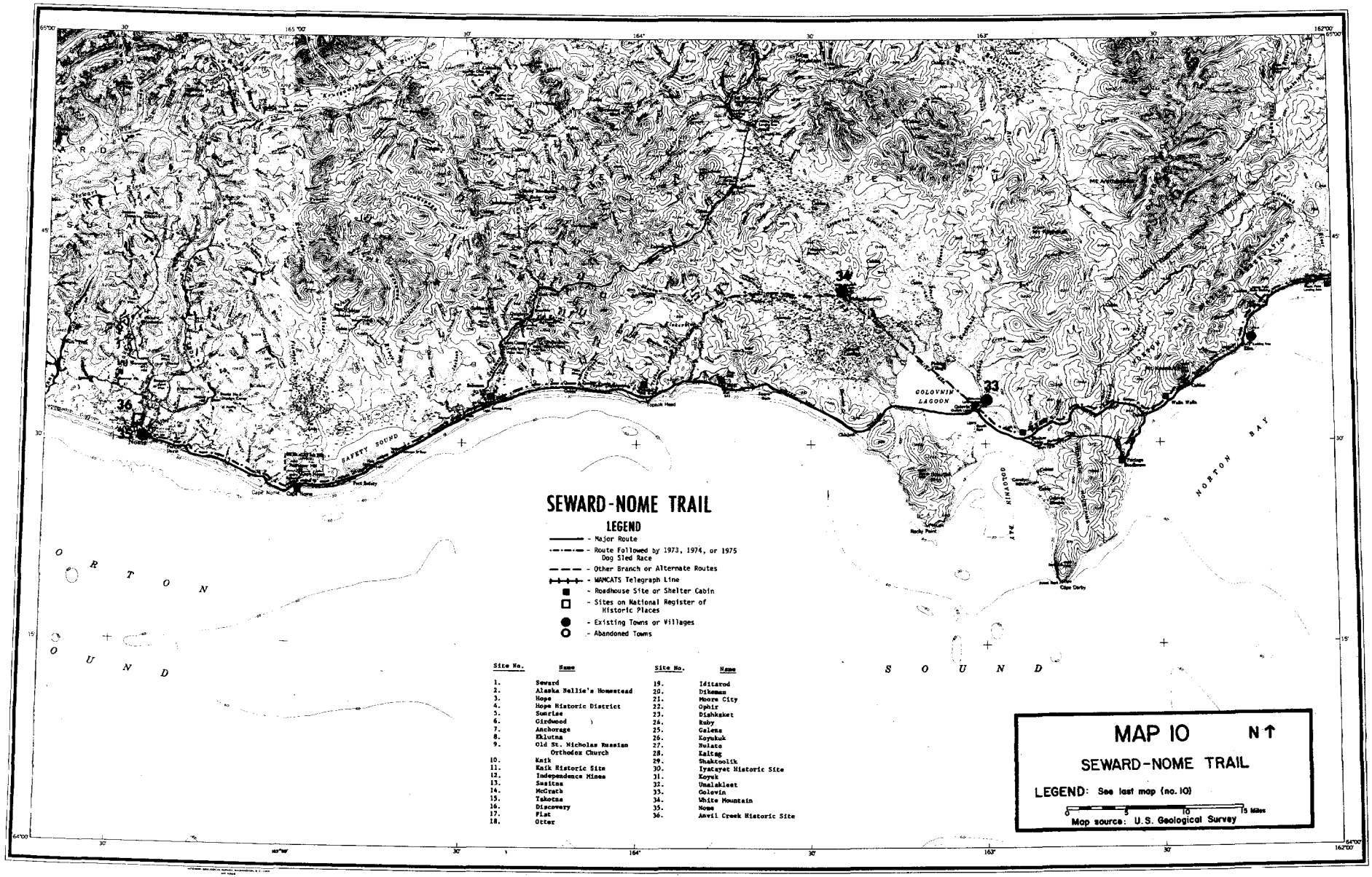

MAP 5
N↑
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey


SEE MAP 8
SEE MAP 8
SEE MAP 7
23
22
MAP 6
N ↑
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey

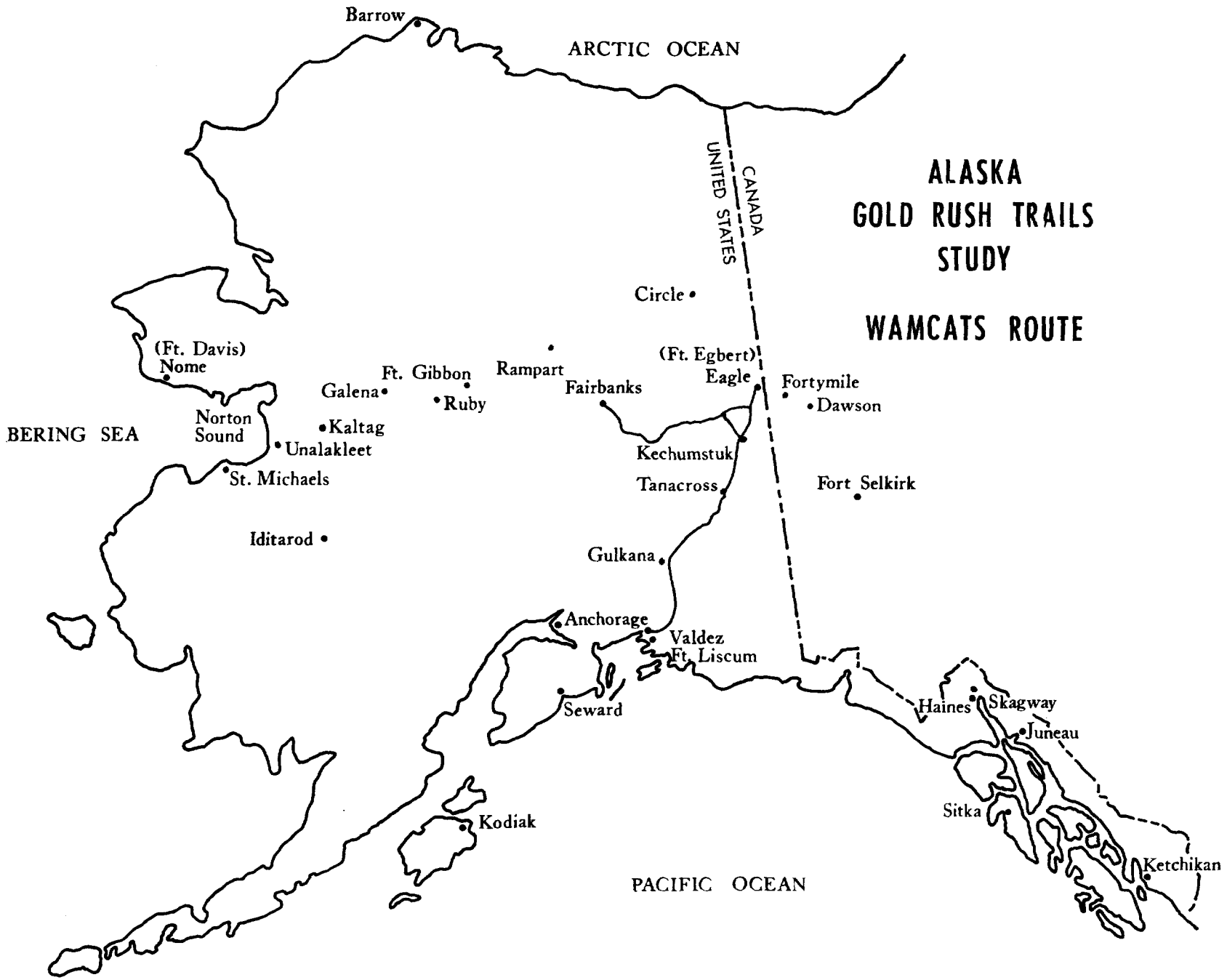

MAP 7
N
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
YUKON
RIVER
NOWITNA


MAP 8
N↑
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
26
25
27
28
To Eagle & Valdez
YUKON
RIVER
MOUNTAINS
RANGE


NORTON BAY
NATIVE RESERVATION
REINDEER RESERVATION
NORTON SOUND
KOTZEBUE
30
29
31
MAP 9
N↑
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey


SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND
- Major Route
- Route Followed by 1973, 1974, or 1975 Dog Sled Race
- Other Branch or Alternate Routes
- WAMCATS Telegraph Line
- Roadhouse Site or Shelter Cabin
- Sites on National Register of Historic Places
- Existing Towns or Villages
- Abandoned Towns
Site No. Name
1. Seward
2. Alaska Nellie's Homestead
3. Hope
4. Hope Historic District
5. Sunrise
6. Girdwood
7. Anchorage
8. Eklutna
9. Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church
10. Knik
11. Knik Historic Site
12. Independence Mines
13. Susitna
14. McGrath
15. Takotna
16. Discovery
17. Flat
18. Otter
19. Iditarod
20. Dikeman
21. Moore City
22. Ophir
23. Dishkaket
24. Ruby
25. Galena
26. Koyukuk
27. Nulato
28. Kaltag
29. Shaktoolik
30. Iyatayet Historic Site
31. Koyuk
32. Unalakleet
33. Golovin
34. White Mountain
35. Nome
36. Anvil Creek Historic Site
GOLOVNIN LAGOON
GOLOVNIN BAY
NORTON BAY
SAFETY SOUND
S O U N D
MAP 10
N↑
SEWARD-NOME TRAIL
LEGEND: See last map (no. 10)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey

Washington - Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS)


ALASKA
GOLD RUSH TRAILS
STUDY
WAMCATS ROUTE
Barrow
ARCTIC OCEAN
UNITED STATES
CANADA
Circle
(Ft. Davis)
Nome
Ft. Gibbon
Rampart
(Ft. Egbert)
Eagle
Fortymile
Galena
Ruby
Fairbanks
Dawson
BERING SEA
Norton
Sound
Kaltag
Unalakleet
Kechumstuk
St. Michaels
Tanacross
Fort Selkirk
Iditarod
Gulkana
Anchorage
Valdez
Ft. Liscum
Seward
Haines
Skagway
Juneau
Sitka
Kodiak
Ketchikan
PACIFIC OCEAN

WASHINGTON-ALASKA MILITARY CABLE AND TELEGRAPH SYSTEM (WAMCATS)

BACKGROUND

With the influx of thousands of miners to Alaskan and Canadian gold fields, the need for a reliable, speedy means of communication with the outside became paramount in the late 1890's. To send a message from the interior of Alaska to Washington, D. C., and receive a reply generally required a year's time. Accordingly, on May 26, 1900, the Congress authorized the War Department, which administered Alaska, to begin construction of a system of telegraph lines and submarine cables which would interconnect all of Alaska's military posts and tie in directly with the rest of the United States and Washington, D. C.

The telegraph portion of the network was completed in 1903. Initially, the network tied in with a line extending south through Canada by way of Dawson and Vancouver. However, in 1904, a submarine cable connecting Seattle and Ft. Liscum was completed, thus eliminating the necessity for transmitting all messages from Alaska through Canada.

By 1906, some 2,347 miles of submarine cable, 1,375 miles of land line, and a 107-mile wireless link across Norton Sound comprised the WAMCATS network. The estimated costs were $1,144,907 for the submarine cable, $848,375 for land lines, and $32,700 for the wireless line.

LOCATION AND REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

General Alignment

The telegraph line portion of WAMCATS comprised a total of 1,497 land miles. The two major segments extended between Kechumstuk, Fort Gibbon (Tanana), and St. Michaels in an east-west direction, and between Fort Egbert (Eagle) and Fort Liscum (Valdez) in a north-south direction. For this study, most of the mileage of these segments was inspected from the air. Portions were also examined on the ground. The line between the mouth of the Fortymile River in Canada and Eagle, and in the Fortymile drainage south from Eagle, was examined first-hand during field work for the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River study. The Bureau of Land Management has also evaluated much of the line between Eagle and Valdez.

Length

Three segments (376 miles) of the land-based line were determined to have the best potential for recreational use and historic interpretation due to terrain conditions, accessibility, and the existence of historical remnants. See the map on page 87. They are:

Fort Egbert to Slana	220 miles
Kechumstuk to the Richardson Highway in the vicinity of Quartz Lake	145 miles
Fort Egbert to Dawson	11 miles in Alaska, plus approximately 100 miles in Canada

A fourth section comprising approximately 20 miles south of Tonsina through Kimball Pass is discussed under the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail. A fifth section comprising some 95 miles between Unalakleet and Kaltag is discussed under the Iditarod Trail.

Regional Climate, Topography, Vegetation, and Wildlife

The climate associated with the Eagle area is characterized by severe winters and mild summers with long hours of daylight. During the winter, extended periods with temperatures at or below -35°F are common. Periods where the temperature drops to -50°F are not unusual. Generally the winters are noted for the lack of wind, hence the wind chill factor is not as serious as in other parts of Alaska. Summers are warm with temperatures reaching 70°F and occasionally 90°F. Freezing temperatures may occur during any month. Thunderstorms are common and normally localized.

Topography is varied, ranging from the gently rolling hills of the Yukon-Tanana Upland immediately south of Eagle, to narrow river and stream valleys, to the extensive flood plain of the Tanana River. A major muskeg area is found in the Mosquito Flats area along the Fortymile River. Elevation ranges from less than 1,000 feet at Eagle, to 4,000 feet in the Fortymile drainage, to 1,500 feet in the Tanana Valley, to almost 4,000 feet in Indian Pass just north of Slana.

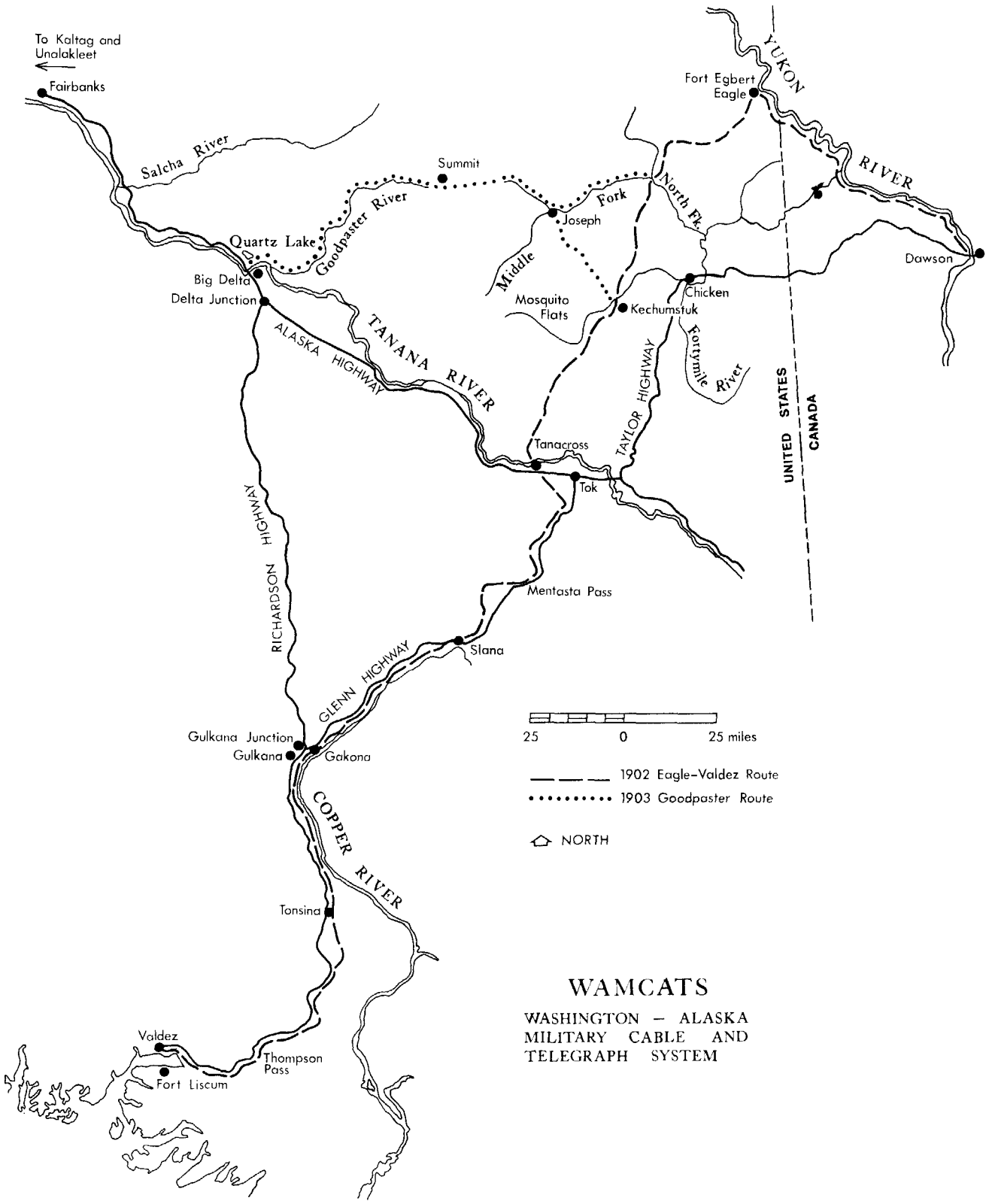
Vegetation is variable, ranging from alpine tundra to mixed spruce-birch forests along the water courses.

A wide range of wildlife species-including moose, wolf, caribou, grizzly and black bear, the lesser mammals, and birds--occur in relative abundance.

Land Uses and Access

Overall land use in the area is associated with mining, hunting, fishing, and trapping. Major communities are Eagle, Big Delta, Tanacross, and Mentasta Lake.

Public access to segments of the line is possible from the Glenn, Richardson, and Taylor Highways. The line north of the Alaska Highway is not readily accessible.



WAMCATS

WASHINGTON – ALASKA
MILITARY CABLE AND
TELEGRAPH SYSTEM

General Land Ownership

The bulk of the land adjoining the three study segments is administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Several important sections and associated structures are within the boundary of the proposed Fortymile Wild and Scenic River. A small but undetermined portion of the total length is included within mining claims and existing highway rights-of-way. Key portions are included within areas classified for potential selection by Alaskan Natives under the provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Land status of the Canadian segment between Eagle and Dawson is unknown. Several of the main telegraph stations and emergency line cabins are included in private applications filed by Alaskan Natives under the provisions of the 1906 Native Allotment Act, and a number are utilized as winter trapping quarters.

The Alaska Department of Highways, in its compilation of existing public trails filed with the Joint Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission in May 1974, identifies much of the WAMCATS as an existing public trail.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

History of Establishment[1/]

Fort Egbert at Eagle was the base for construction of the first telegraph line in Alaska. This telegraph line ran along the Yukon River for 12 miles eastward to the Canadian Border, and was completed in October 1900. The Canadians completed their line prior to completion of the American line. The line ran north from Dawson City to meet the American line, and south from Dawson City to Whitehorse. Messages could then be sent from Fort Egbert to Dawson and Whitehorse, and carried overland to Skagway. The telegram was then sent by mailship to Seattle, and telegraphed from there to any part of the contiguous United States. Fort Egbert could receive messages from the United States in 5 days at 56 cents per word.

The trans-Canadian line to Vancouver was completed in June 1901. It was then possible to reach the United States and Washington, D. C., by telegraph directly from Fort Egbert. The Canadian telegraph line was poor throughout its operation, and undependable as line breaks were common. Also it was often difficult to get messages sent promptly

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1/ The following account was taken almost verbatim from a report by William A. Quirk, III, Historical Aspects of the Building of the Washington, D. C.-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System, with Special Emphasis on the Eagle-Valdez and Goodpaster Telegraph Lines, 1902-1903, Bureau of Land Management, Fairbanks District Office, May 1974.

through the Canadian system. However, this was the first direct telegraphic communications between Alaska and Washington, D. C., though not an all-American line.

During the same period of time, telegraph lines were being constructed from Nome to Fort Davis, a distance of 4 miles, and to Port Safety some 20 miles distant. In 1901, the first sea cable in Alaska was laid 107 miles across Norton Sound to connect Port Safety with Fort Saint Michael. Late in the same year, the 448-mile telegraph line from Fort Saint Michael to Fort Gibbon was completed under the leadership of Lt. George Gibbs.

Telegraph line construction beyond Fort Gibbon toward Eagle was temporarily halted as a route had not been chosen. While telegraph lines from Fort Saint Michael were rapidly being completed eastward to Fort Gibbon, great difficulties were encountered in the building of the Eagle-Valdez line.

Telegraph line construction between Eagle and Valdez became a matter of highest priority. Line completion would bring Valdez, the Prince William Sound region, and the rich Copper River valley into communication with the United States. The line would follow Lt. Henry Allen's Alaska route to the Klondike gold fields, as opposed to following the Canadian route. Lt. Allen had blazed a trail from Valdez to Eagle in 1885. In 1898-99, infantrymen led by Major Abercrombie opened the first 170 miles of Lt. Allen's trail from Valdez to Chistochina and made it usable for pack trains. The road was given the title of Trans-Alaska Military Road.

Captain George Burnell of the Signal Corps and his men began building the telegraph line northward from Valdez in July 1900. They built 37 miles up Keystone Canyon, across Thompson Pass, and into the Copper River valley. Construction work in the summer of 1901 was slowed by the hauling of supplies over the high and rugged Thompson Pass and through swamps in the Copper River valley. Meanwhile, little had been done by a detachment of Army infantrymen who were working southward from Fort Egbert.

In the summer of 1901, Brigadier General A. W. Greely, head of the Signal Corps in Washington, D. C., and a famous Arctic explorer, sent a 21-year-old first lieutenant named William Mitchell to Fort Egbert to investigate the delays in the Alaska telegraph line to the south. Lt. Mitchell (who later became famous as Brigadier General William "Billy" Mitchell of the Army Air Corps for his predictions on the role of air power in warfare) had learned military telegraph line construction while serving in the Philippine Insurrection. He had other military experience in the Spanish-American War.

Lt. Billy Mitchell made his base at Fort Egbert near Eagle for the next 2 years (1901-1903). During this time, he directed construction

of the Eagle-Valdez line to the Tanana River, a distance of 153 miles, and directed the exploration and construction of some 204 miles of the Goodpaster line in very difficult terrain.

All stores and equipment--including foodstuffs, hay, oats, special sleds, harnesses, and transport animals (dogs, horses, and mules)--for the telegraph line came up the Yukon in summer by boat and were unloaded at Eagle.

During winter, horses and mules sledded foodstuffs, materials, and equipment from Fort Egbert over the snow and ice to field locations along the Eagle-Valdez line to Tanana Crossing (now Tanacross), a distance of 147 miles. Billy Mitchell set to work to establish the course of the new line. First the line was surveyed, next the right-of-way was chopped, then the wire was run over the snow.

Insulators, brackets, and nails were tied to the wire every quarter of a mile in sufficient quantities for the intervening distance. This was done because in summer, transport animals could not pack the wire and move camps in the same manner as in winter.

As summer 1902 approached, Mitchell's crew dug holes, placed poles in the ground, and elevated the wire at a record pace. On August 24, 1902, Mitchell completed the line to Tanana Crossing. He was met there by Captain George Burnell, who built the line from Valdez. Telegraphic messages could now be sent from Prince William Sound and Valdez through the Fortymile country to Eagle, then retelegraphed over the Canadian line to Vancouver and Seattle. Telegraphic communications from southeast Alaska funneled through Skagway and Whitehorse and down the Canadian line after a new submarine cable was laid from Juneau to Skagway in summer 1902. The remaining link needed was to connect Fort Gibbon and Baker with Eagle.

Preparations were being made in 1902 at Fort Egbert for the final work, the joining of the Fort Egbert-Fort Liscum line to the line from Fort Saint Michael, which at this time extended to Baker on the Tanana River.

Mitchell reconnoitered to determine where the line should be located. On January 1, 1903, he mushed from Eagle to the confluence of the Goodpaster and Tanana Rivers, thus discovering the route along the Goodpaster drainage.

Mitchell and his crew mushed back to Eagle, and he began mobilizing his men. They sledded some 300 tons of supplies 95 miles to the head of the Goodpaster River in preparation for building the line. Work was begun in both directions from this point (now called Summit Station); i.e., from Kechumstuk (the tapoff on the Eagle-Valdez line) to Summit, and from Summit to Big Delta. By the last of April 1903, the wire had been run for the entire distance from Kechumstuk to the mouth of the Goodpaster River. Mitchell expected to meet the party

working up the Tanana River, but it had not been able to get within 65 miles of that point due to insurmountable obstacles.

Because the Federal appropriation for the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System ran out on June 30, 1903, Mitchell was determined to finish the last link in the line by that date.

Sufficient supplies and materials had been left at the Goodpaster River in the event the party working up the Tanana River did not reach Mitchell's working party. Mitchell's crew was ordered to build boats from whipsawed lumber at Central Station and, as soon as the ice on the Goodpaster River broke up, to move supplies down the river to the Tanana River. Pack trains were also sent to cooperate in hauling supplies down the Tanana River.

During the month of May, Mitchell's parties, with their pack trains, were working between Kechumstuk and the mouth of the Goodpaster River, putting in poles and elevating the wire. All stations had been chosen, and caches of rations for the working parties and forage for the animals were in place. In addition, a year's supplies for three men and one dog team were carried to each cache along the entire route for maintenance after the line was built.

Mitchell's parties had to reach the Salcha River, some 65 miles away, before the June 30 deadline, and the final run down the Tanana River began on May 31, 1903. Work progressed rapidly in spite of numerous obstacles and serious problems. The crews' meat ran out, but they obtained caribou and bear meat as substitutes. Mosquitoes were nearly intolerable for both men and animals, and long smoky fires were built to keep the insects away. Getting the boats through the Bates Rapids on the Tanana River took special care. On June 10, when the line was half finished, a forest fire more than 250 miles long burned in the direction of the line. After June 10, the men worked through the fire and, in some places, carried the wire through the smoking embers by galloping through on a mule.

On June 27, 1903, near the Salcha River, Lt. Mitchell met Lt. Gibbs, who was working up the Tanana River from Fairbanks and the final connection was made.

The Trans-Alaska Telegraph System comprised some 1,447 miles of overland lines and a few hundred miles of submarine cable. Telegraphic messages could be sent to Eagle from Nome and Fort Saint Michael on the Bering Sea; up the Yukon and Tanana Rivers to Fort Gibbon, then Fairbanks; and from Prince William Sound and Valdez. From Eagle, these messages were channeled through the Canadian line to Vancouver and Seattle, and on to Washington, D. C., and the rest of the United States.

All of the telegraph lines had been constructed in just 3 years, 1 month, and 1 day. The line builders faced tremendous hardships and

difficulties. Supplying all materials over interior Alaska in winter by sledding or pack animals, over the roughest, most primitive trails in undeveloped country, was a tremendous task in itself. The work was led by Captain George Burnell and Lts. William Mitchell and George Gibbs, and, at various times, by the 3rd, 7th, 8th, 10th, and 13th Infantries.

Wire, insulators, brackets, nails, foodstuffs, hay, oats, and other supplies were often transported long distances. All supplies and equipment for the 428-mile Eagle-Valdez Telegraph Line were hauled 168 miles south from Eagle or 260 miles north from Valdez to Tanana Crossing. In constructing the Goodpaster Telegraph Line, Mitchell's crew transported supplies 273 miles from Eagle.

In 1903, Congress appropriated funds for the construction of submarine cables from Juneau to Sitka and from Sitka to Seattle, a total distance of 1,377 miles. It was not until 1904 that these lines were completed. Another appropriation in April 1904 provided for construction of a cable from Sitka to Valdez, a distance of 600 miles. This line was laid in the Gulf of Alaska and was completed in October 1904, thus completing an all-American line of telegraph communications.

The original submarine cable laid in Norton Sound in 1901 was ruptured when the ice went out in the summer 1902. After private companies gave up, the Signal Corps continued to work on wireless radio across the Norton Sound. In August 1903, Captain Wildman succeeded in making contact with St. Michael from Port Safety, 107 miles away. This achievement represented the first long distance wireless telegraphy in the United States.

Military records indicate land lines in Alaska were estimated to have cost the government $617 per mile, while submarine cables cost $452 per mile. Annual maintenance of these telegraph lines cost $6.25 per mile. During one of the early years, there were more than 200 interruptions of telegraph service with causes divided almost equally among blizzards, forest fires, sleet storms, high winds, and vandalism.

The line was maintained by detachments of soldiers stationed at log cabins every 40 miles. Each detachment was made up of one Signal Corps repairman and two assistants from the Army. A sled and dog team of seven dogs were used for winter transportation. Relief cabins for shelter from the frequent blizzards were located between the repair cabins. When service over the line was broken, a repairman and infantryman started out from the cabins on each side of the break. The first man to reach the fault made repairs and awaited the arrival of the other party. After contact was established, both crews returned to their stations.

By September 1910, there were some 1,506 miles of land lines, 2,630 miles of submarine cables, and wireless telegraphy covering 934 miles.

Old telegraph station still remaining in Forty Mile River area. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

TABLE IV. The Land Line, Wireless, and Submarine Cable Components of WAMCATS in 1904

	MILES	TOTAL MILES
Land Lines		
Nome-Kechumstuk	933	
Fort Gibbon-Baker	125	
Eagle-Valdez	428	
Fort Egbert-Boundary	11	
Total Land Telegraph Lines		1,497
Wireless Telegraphy (Radio)		
Port Safety-St. Michael		107
Submarine Cable		
Seattle-Sitka	1,070	
Sitka-Valdez	640	
Sitka-Juneau	291	
Juneau-Fort Seward (Haines)	102	
Fort Seward-Skagway	21	
Total Submarine Cable		2,124
Total Mileage in WAMCATS		3,728

At that time, wireless telegraphy began to supplant the land and sea cable system.

Period of Use

Between 1903 and 1910, the original WAMCATS system performed most ably. During the year ending June 30, 1906, a total of 306,454 messages were handled, including 253,338 commercial and 53,116 military. Even until 1921, most messages within Alaska and from Alaska to the United States involved portions of the line between Eagle and Valdez. However, by 1907, it had become evident that maintenance costs for the land lines would continue to be exceedingly high and that wireless communications appeared feasible. In 1911, the Gulkana-Fort Egbert telegraph line, totaling some 290 miles, was abandoned in favor of wireless with an estimated savings of $50,000 annually. By 1915, there were only 848 miles of land line in operation within Alaska. A major portion of this comprised the line between Fort Liscum and Fairbanks along the 375-mile long Valdez to Fairbanks Trail (Richardson Highway). In 1923, the military recommended transferring the Valdez-Fairbanks line to the Alaska Road Commission for conversion to telephone service. The final transfer of the Valdez-Fairbanks telegraph line took place in 1926.

In the early 1900's, portions of the original telegraph route appear to have been used for trail access to the Fortymile gold fields.

Historical Trail Remnants

Most of the area traversed by the three study segments is largely isolated and appears much as when the original construction took place in 1900-1903.

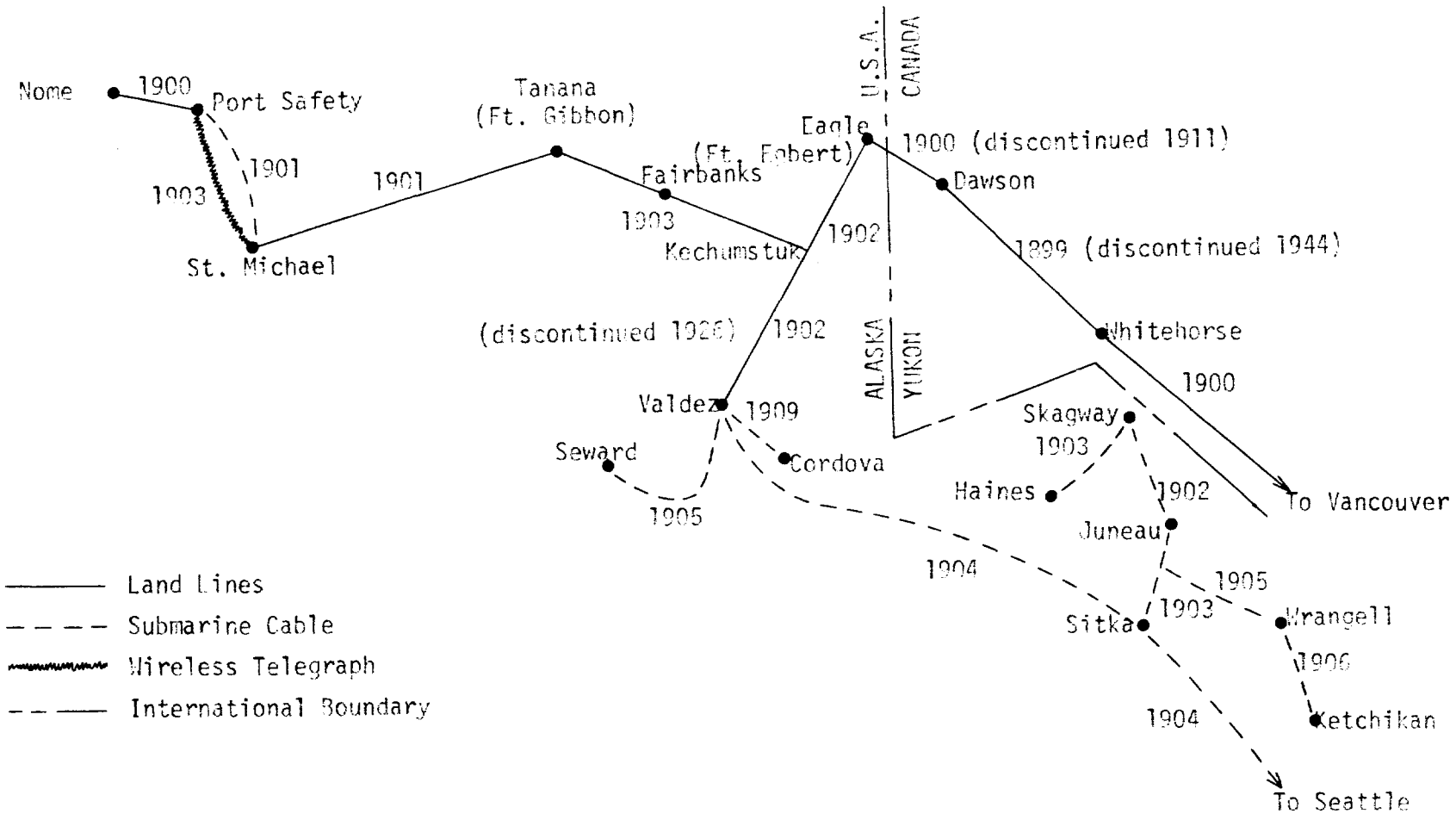
Field examinations indicate substantial portions of these three segments are still intact. From the air, the line locations through spruce forests and over some of the tundra and muskeg areas can be readily determined. Several of the main telegraph stations and intervening shelter cabins have been found to be structurally intact and still contain military stoves manufactured around 1880. Articles related to military operation of WAMCATS remain and appear to have substantial historical value. For example, the remnants of a gramophone instrument have been found at one station, together with a large supply of green glass insulators from Brookfield, New York. Rolls of telegraph wire still are found along segments of the line, while frequently wire, poles, and insulator brackets are in place.

Preliminary studies by the Bureau of Land Management indicate that portions of these segments probably qualify for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. No nominations have yet been submitted.

Key historical points along the three study segments are: the Alaska-Dawson connection; the meeting point of the August 24, 1902, linkage

A sketch showing completion dates of the

Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System



of the Fort Egbert-Fort Liscum line near Tanacross; Kechumstuk, the main interconnection between telegraphic messages involving western Alaska forts, the rest of Alaska, and the outside; Fort Egbert, the major supply distribution point for construction of significant portions of the Fort Egbert-Fort Liscum-Fort Gibbon-Dawson lines; Summit Station, the primary supply depot and starting point for constructing the Goodpaster line; at least 13 primary telegraph relay stations; an unknown number of emergency shelters; and substantial tangible evidence of the original line locations as well as alternative routings and key segments where wire insulators and poles remain intact.

Related Historic Sites

The Eagle National Historic District, including the entire Fort Egbert site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. The Eagle area is also a key element of the proposed Yukon-Charley National Rivers extending from the vicinity of the United States border to Circle.

There are substantial and significant international values associated with the Canadian gold fields at Dawson and Canadian historic and park programs associated with Dawson and the Fort Cudahay-Fortymile sites.

The Fortymile River, encompassing portions of the original WAMCATS line, several relay stations, and military shelter cabins, has been recommended for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. If approved by Congress, this river and adjoining lands would be managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Conceptual management and development plans prepared for that proposal also involve plans to protect and interpret WAMCATS and the role of gold mining in the settlement of Alaska.

The abandoned Native communities of Joseph and Kechumstuk are believed to have substantial Native historic and cultural values. It is presumed that both sites will be placed in Native ownership under the provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

The Eagle Historic Society, Chicken Historic Society, Alaska Division of Parks, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Canadian Park Service, and several Alaskan Native communities all have a strong interest in the historic and cultural values of this area.

Historical Significance

One of the most important and lasting events associated with the discovery of gold in Alaska and the ensuing gold rushes was the development of a communications system which tied together far-flung gold fields and military posts within Alaska and linked them with the remainder of the United States. The Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System, authorized by the Congress on May 26, 1900,

Fort Egbert restoration. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

commemorates an unparalleled effort in the annals of telegraphic engineering due to the large scope of the effort and the challenge of constructing and operating reliable, quick communication in an unknown and largely uninhabited region.

PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE TRAIL USES

Present Trail Condition

Most of the WAMCATS overland route involved in the three study segments is in a run down condition having been substantially without maintenance since abandonment around 1911. Small portions, notably in the Mentasta Pass area, Kechumstuk, and lower Goodpaster River, have been converted to primitive trails for vehicular access and/or winter haul roads. Current editions of U. S. Geological Survey maps indicate a network of trails in the upper Fortymile drainage. On-the-ground inspection revealed that these trails follow the original telegraph line.

Through forested areas, the slow regeneration of trees where the line was constructed makes much of the route readily visible from the air. In alpine and muskeg areas, location is more difficult.

Scenic and Recreational Qualities

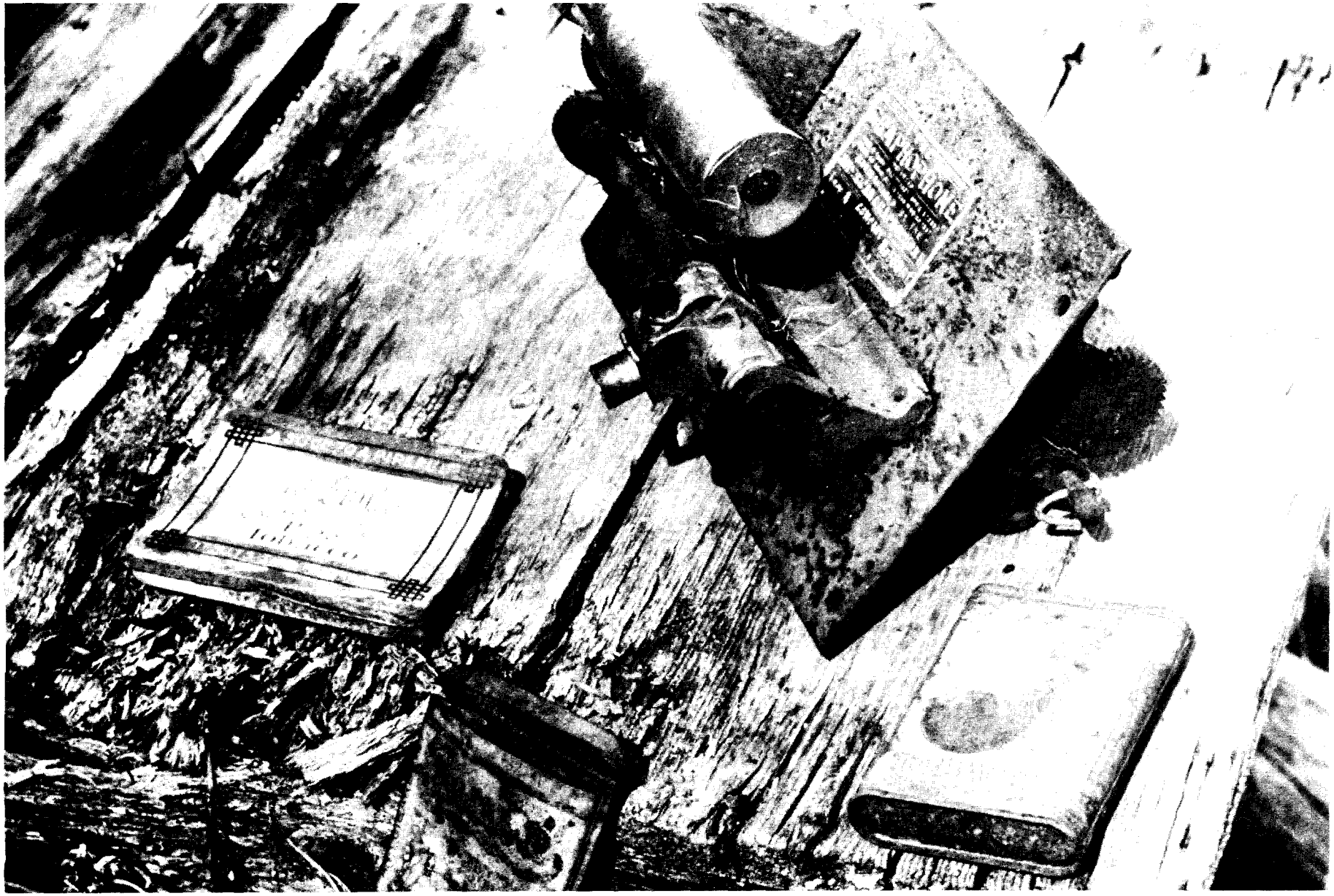
The three segments have a diverse and pleasing array of scenic values ranging from the Yukon and Tanana Rivers to sweeping vistas of the Alaska Range in the tundra divide of the Fortymile drainages.

Ground checks of the original route in selected parts of the Fortymile drainage indicated those portions have substantial recreation potential as hiking trails and perhaps horseback trails. Since the WAMCATS line was designed to be serviced on foot, mule, snowshoe, or dogsled, adverse terrain features were avoided whenever possible. However, many crossings of steep ravines, rivers, and muskeg could not be avoided.

As most portions of the WAMCATS route are well removed from the existing highways, the route provides access into areas which are still primitive and undeveloped. Opportunities to view wildlife--ranging from Dall sheep in the higher elevations near Mentasta and Eagle to moose, wolves, caribou, and numerous smaller animals and birds--are excellent. There are many interesting geological and floral features.

Recreational Uses

Except for visitors to the Eagle area, present recreational use of the three segments is almost nonexistent. Some of the route is used for hunter and fisherman access, principally in the Kechumstuk area. While there are no records, this use probably does not exceed 20 recreation days annually. Poor access and lack of public knowledge of the area are the principal reasons for the light use.



Gramaphone cylinder and tobacco cans found in the Forty Mile River area. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

Future potential recreational use could include hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, dog mushing, and snowshoeing. Portions of the route could also be used by riders of snowmachines in winter and trail bikes in summer.

Nonrecreational Uses

Portions of the line are being utilized for vehicular access to mining claims and trapping headquarters. At present, these uses involve only a minor amount of the 376 miles included in this analysis.

Several of the main relay stations, and possibly emergency shelters, constructed by the military are included within pending applications under the 1906 Native Allotment Act. Therefore, it is likely that some of the historic structures associated with WAMCATS will pass into private ownership.

In July 1973, the Alaska Department of Highways submitted to the Joint Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission long-range plans to construct a highway affecting the route. These plans include a substantial portion of the original, largely unaltered portion of WAMCATS in the Goodpaster drainage and the Fortymile River basin. However, the Department of Highways, by letter of December 3, 1974, to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, stated that present planning indicates if a highway is ever built in the corridor, the Salcha rather than the Goodpaster drainage system would be followed. A highway in the Salcha River drainage would have minimal effects on WAMCATS.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Qualification for National Scenic Trail Designation

The criteria used in evaluating the WAMCATS Trail are as follows:

Criterion: Because of their special characteristics, National Scenic Trails should be nationally significant and be capable of attracting visitors from throughout the United States.

Finding: The three segments of WAMCATS totaling 376 miles are of national historic significance in their relationship to the settlement and exploration of Alaska during the stampedes of gold seekers to and from the Alaskan and Canadian gold fields and capable of attracting visitors from throughout the United States. A wide variety of high quality outdoor recreation opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, dogsledding, nature study, and geological study in a largely natural, scenic portion of Alaska are found along these three segments.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails are designated for hiking and other compatible uses. The National Trails System Act prohibits the

use of motorized equipment on these trails, except in certain circumstances.

Finding: The historic route is largely undeveloped at present, although much of the trail, lines, and cabins remain intact, making it feasible to develop a trail along the general route for hiking and other compatible purposes.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails of historical importance should adhere as accurately as possible to their principal historic routes.

Finding: The routes from Fort Egbert to the United States/Canada border comprising 11 miles, Fort Egbert to Slana comprising 220 miles, and Kechumstuk to Quartz Lake comprising 145 miles follow the original location of key sections of WAMCATS.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be provided with adequate public access through connecting local or regional trails. Access should be located at reasonable intervals to provide for trips of various lengths.

Finding: Access to the Eagle-Fort Egbert area is by auto over the Taylor Highway and by air. A small airstrip at Joseph provides access to the central portion of the Kechumstuk-Quartz Lake segment while the Richardson Highway provides auto access to the Quartz Lake area. The Alaska Highway intersects WAMCATS at Tanacross, while the Glenn Highway provides good access in the Mentasta-Slana area. The Alaska, Richardson, and Glenn Highways are paved roads open to year-around travel. The Taylor Highway is unpaved and not maintained during the winter months.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be primarily land based.

Finding: The 376-mile segment of WAMCATS is, except for river crossings, land based in its entirety. A major river, the Tanana, is crossed. Several tributaries to the Fortymile are also crossed.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be of sufficient length to encompass and provide appropriate access to the resources which are a basis for the trail's designation.

Finding: The three study links total approximately 376 miles.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be continuous except where no practicable or feasible interconnection exists.

Finding: The 376 miles are interconnected and could be considered as continuous.

Conclusions

The history of WAMCATS is fascinating and many people could receive a valuable and enjoyable experience by viewing some of the remaining traces and having these interpreted. A number of the main telegraph stations, intervening shelter cabins, and telegraph poles are intact. The remnants, however, are somewhat repetitive.

WAMCATS should not be designated as a National Historic Trail. That category should be open only to routes which made history as trails. WAMCATS served primarily as a telegraph line and not as a trail.

Recommendations

The historical importance of WAMCATS is undisputed. The question is how to protect and provide for its interpretation. Protection of the remaining remnants should be a prime consideration in future land use planning by the Bureau of Land Management. Many structures of the era exist in Eagle and some are being rehabilitated. The Bureau plans to interpret these structures and tell the story of WAMCATS. They also plan to display relics from the telegraph line. In conjunction with this, the Bureau should consider developing spur trails from the Taylor Highway to locations on the line and perhaps for short distances along the line. Interpretive signing should be done at these locations. It would be desirable if some of these trails pass a shelter cabin and should be located where some poles are still standing and the old line route is easily identified. No further consideration should be given to WAMCATS as a potential National Scenic Trail or as a National Historic Trail.

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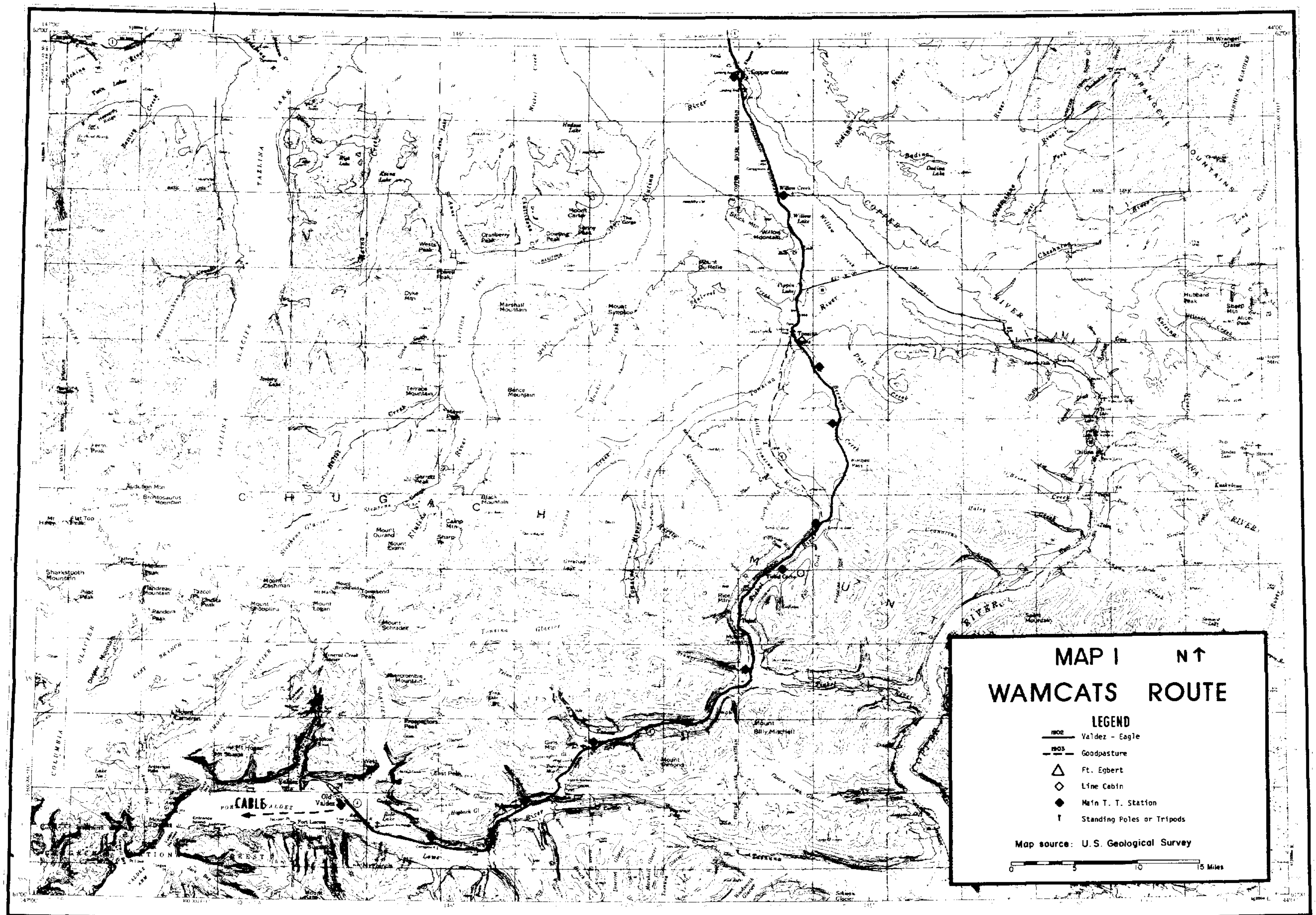
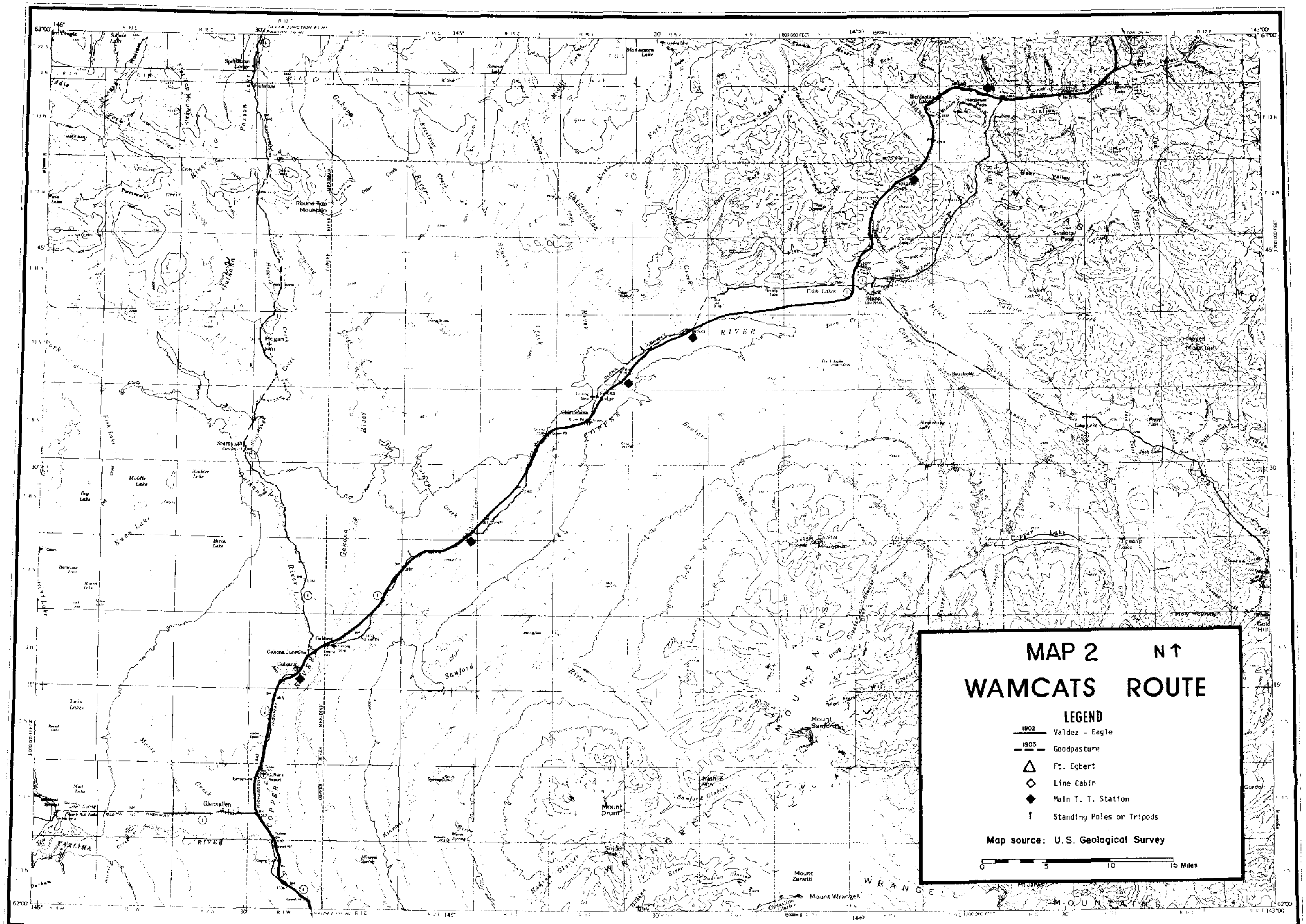
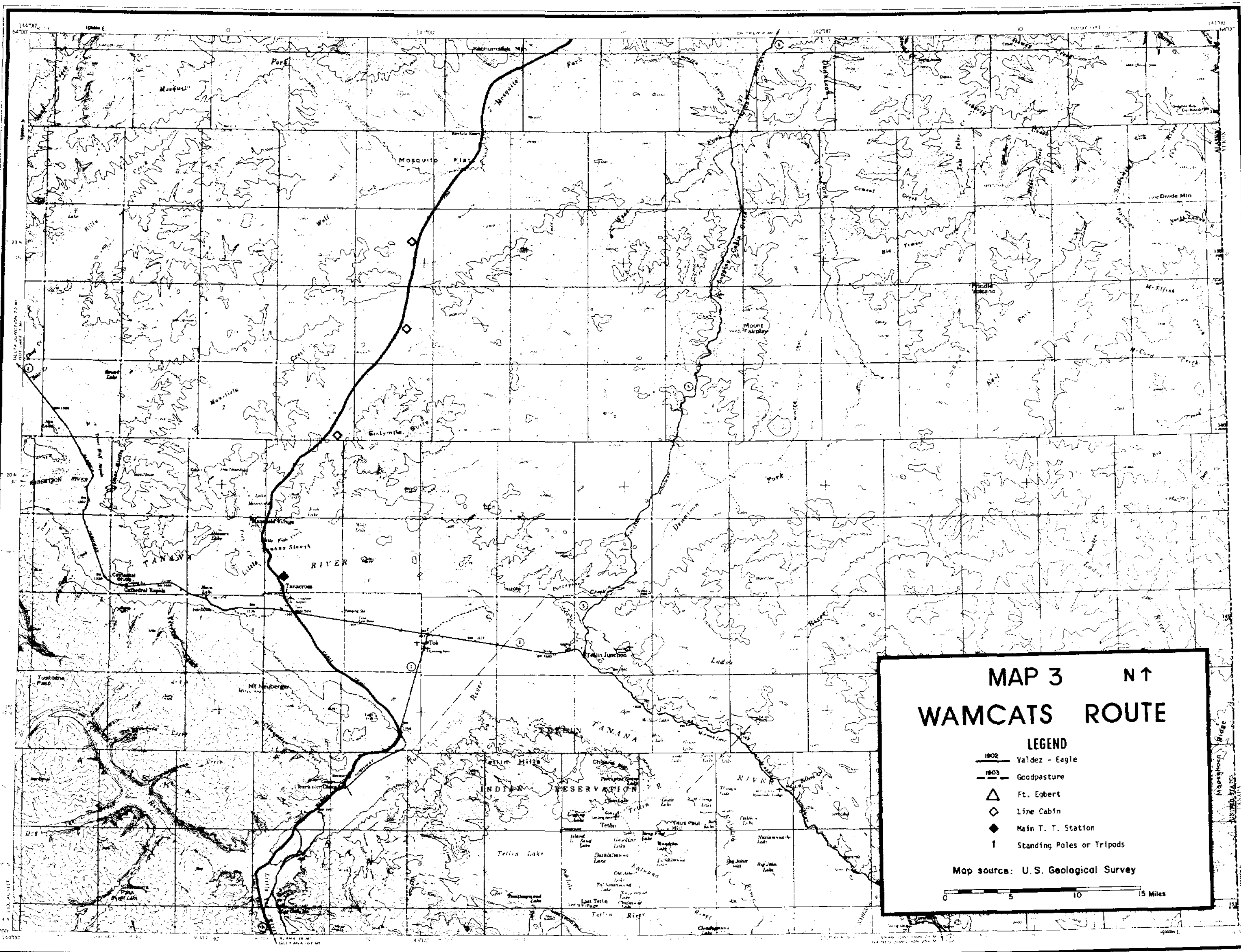
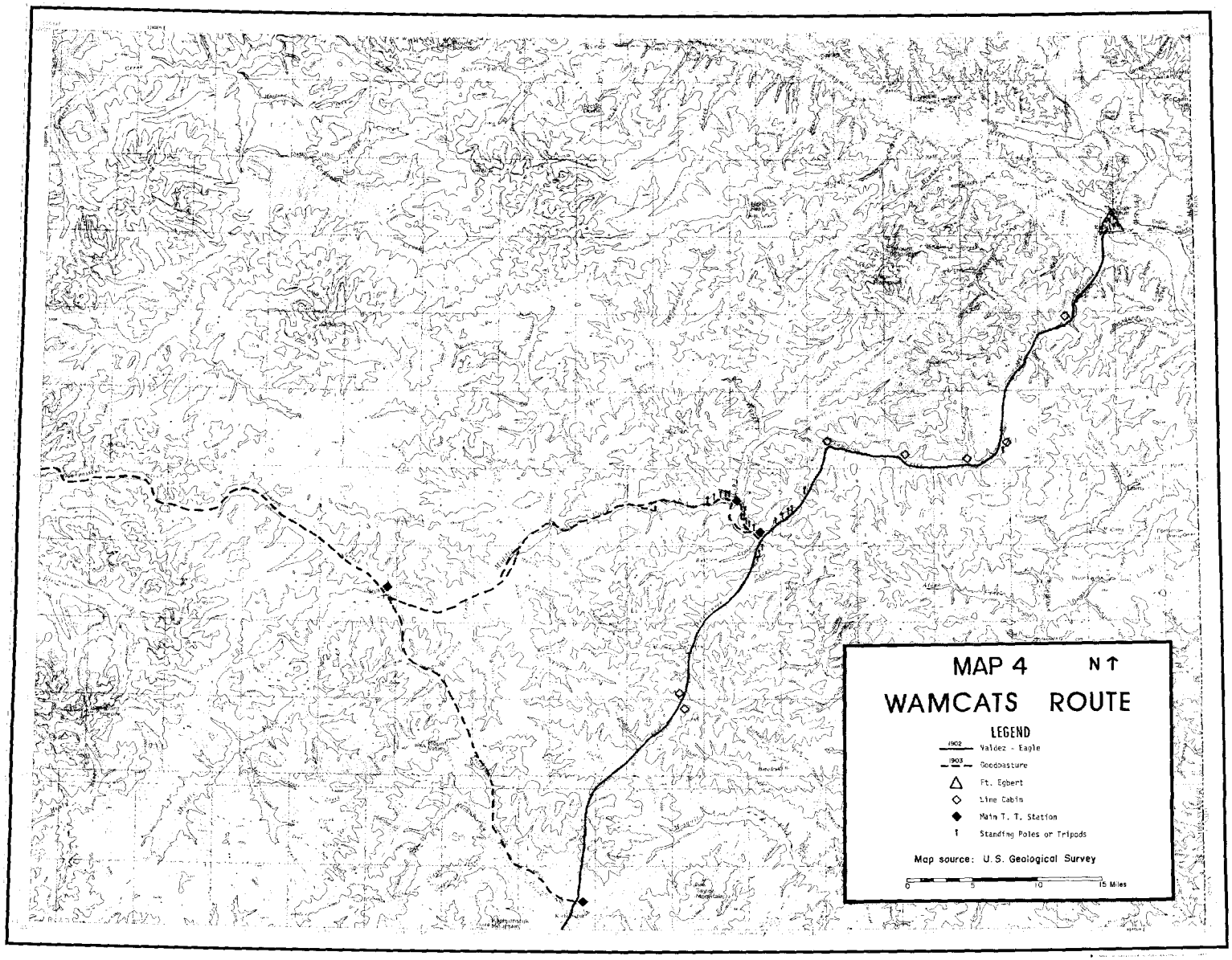


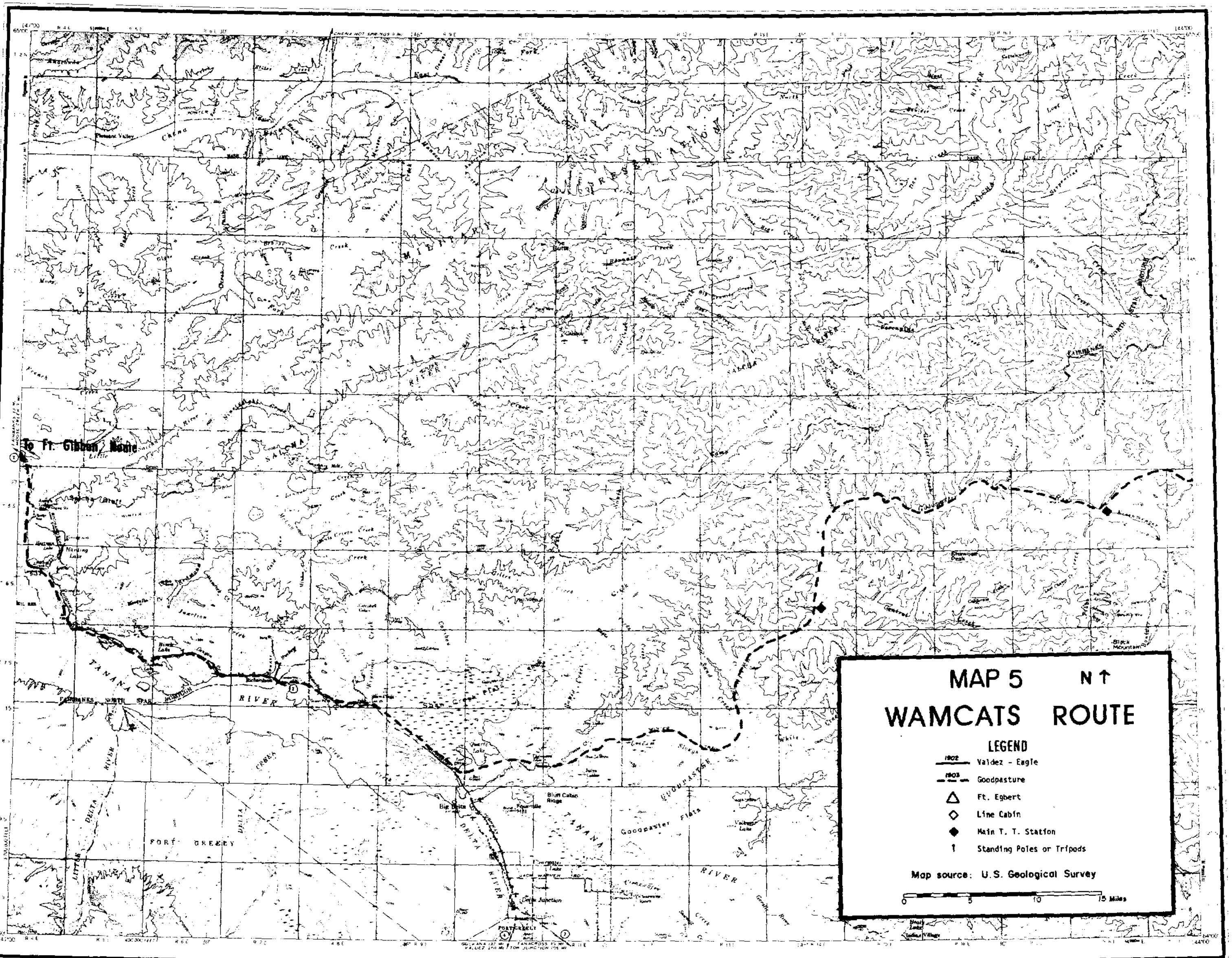
MAP I
N ↑
WAMCATS ROUTE
LEGEND
1902 Valdez - Eagle
1903 Goodpasture
Ft. Egbert
Line Cabin
Main T. T. Station
Standing Poles or Tripods
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles
Copper Center
Willow Creek
Copper River
Wrangell Mountains
Chugach Mountains
Tazlina Lake
Tonsina
Lower Tonsina
Chitina River
Mount Billy Mitchell
Old Valdez
Fort Liscum
Cable
Port Valdez



MAP 2
N
WAMCATS ROUTE
LEGEND
1902 Valdez - Eagle
1903 Goodpasture
Ft. Egbert
Line Cabin
Main T. T. Station
Standing Poles or Tripods
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles
Round Top Mountain
Hogan Hill
Sourdough
Gakona Junction
Gulkana
Glennallen
Capital Mountain
Mount Sanford
Mount Drum
Mount Zanetti
Mount Wrangell
Copper Lake
Tanada Lake
WRANGELL MOUNTAINS

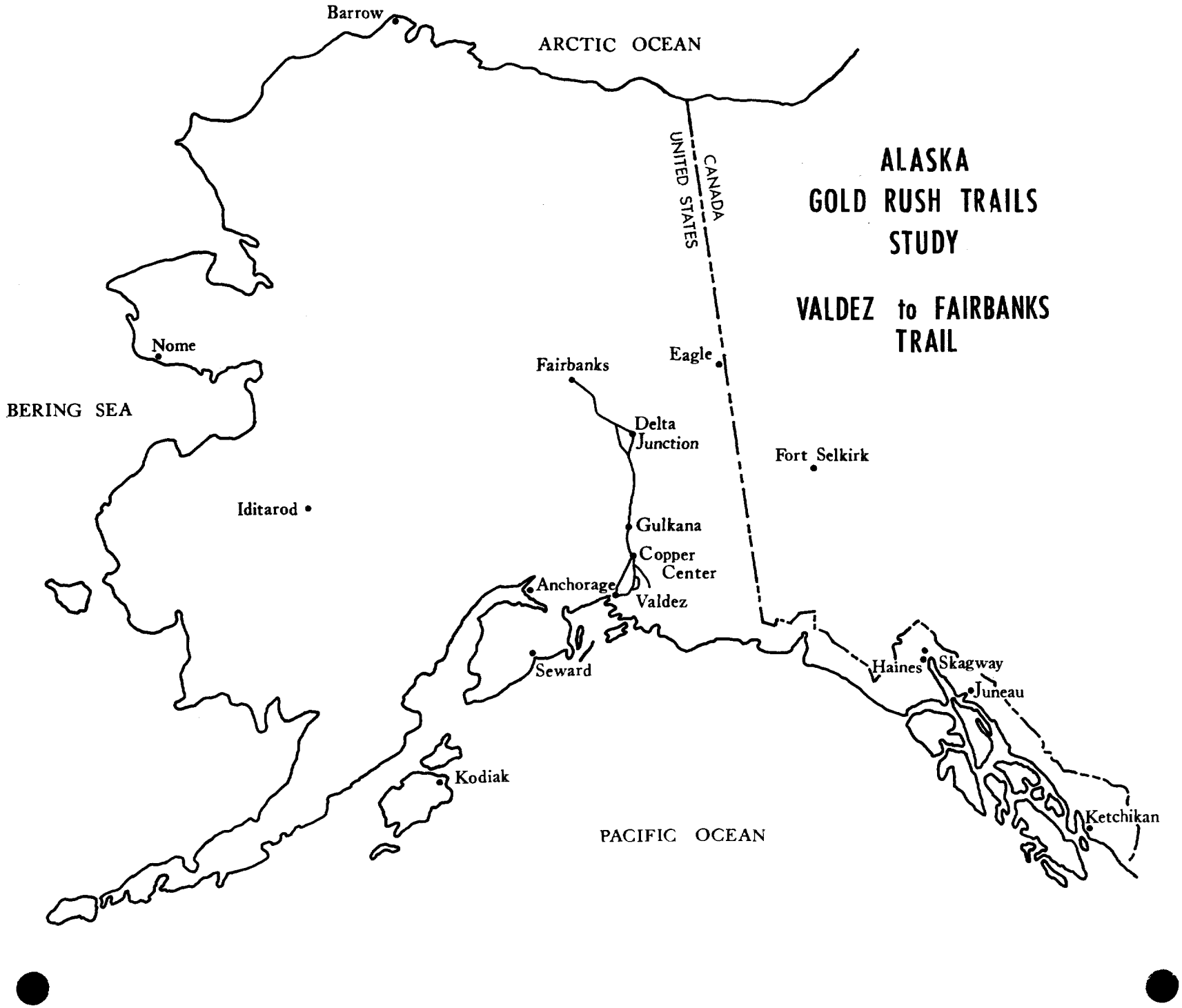

MAP 3
N ↑
WAMCATS ROUTE
LEGEND
1902 Valdez - Eagle
1903 Goodpasture
Ft. Egbert
Line Cabin
Main T. T. Station
Standing Poles or Tripods
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles
Mosquito Flat
Sixtymile Butte
Mount Fairplay
Tanacross
Tok
Tetlin Junction
Tetlin Lake
TANANA RIVER
INDIAN RESERVATION


MAP 4
N ↑
WAMCATS ROUTE
LEGEND
1902 Valdez - Eagle
1903 Goodpasture
Ft. Egbert
Line Cabin
Main T. T. Station
Standing Poles or Tripods
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0
5
10
15 Miles



MAP 5
N
WAMCATS ROUTE
LEGEND
1902 Valdez - Eagle
1903 Goodpasture
Ft. Egbert
Line Cabin
Main T. T. Station
Standing Poles or Tripods
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles
To Ft. Gibbon, Nome
TANANA
RIVER
DELTA
Big Delta
Goodpaster Flats
FORT GREELY

Valdez Trail


Barrow
ARCTIC OCEAN
UNITED STATES
CANADA
ALASKA
GOLD RUSH TRAILS
STUDY
VALDEZ to FAIRBANKS
TRAIL
Nome
BERING SEA
Fairbanks
Eagle
Delta
Junction
Fort Selkirk
Iditarod
Gulkana
Copper
Center
Anchorage
Valdez
Seward
Haines
Skagway
Juneau
Kodiak
Ketchikan
PACIFIC OCEAN

VALDEZ TRAIL (VALDEZ TO FAIRBANKS)

BACKGROUND

Alaska was purchased by the U. S. Government from Russia in 1867. For at least two decades following, the purchasers knew little about most of interior Alaska since the Russians had concentrated along the islands and coastal areas, particularly in Alaska's panhandle. Early explorations into the interior were conducted along the Yukon River. The first official exploration in the area of what was to become the Valdez Trail occurred in the summer of 1884. Lieutenant William R. Abercrombie, U. S. Army, was instructed to lead a party making a reconnaissance of the Copper River. Lieutenant Abercrombie explored the Copper River, reaching a position of latitude 60°41' on the river, then returned to Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island. The party also made explorations in the direction of what is now Valdez.

The U. S. Army, in 1885, sent Second Lieutenant Henry T. Allen to further explore the interior. He proceeded to travel up the Copper River and down the Tanana River valley exploring the Chitina River and other tributaries. Lieutenant Allen met some early prospectors along the Copper River, most notably John Bremner, after whom the Bremner River is named.

Alaska, in the 19th Century, remained an undeveloped country. Other than U. S. military activity, gold seekers seemed to be almost the only persons from the outside interested in Alaska. Because of the prospectors in the Yukon, Tanana, and Copper River areas, the U. S. Army, in 1898, ordered further explorations in order to provide better access, communication, and other aid to these people. Captains Abercrombie and Glenn were ordered to further explore up the Copper River from Valdez. One of the objectives was to find an all-American route (trail) from Valdez to the Yukon. Valdez had come into being November 10, 1897, when ship passengers landed near what was to become Fort Liscum. Construction of Fort Liscum was started in the spring of 1900, almost 3 years later.

Transportation to the gold fields in Alaska and to the Klondike in Canada was mainly by river and was to remain so. However, additional non-water routes were necessary, particularly to an ice-free winter port. Although the Valdez to the Yukon (Fort Egbert, later Eagle) route was explored earlier, it was not until 1900 that an actual trail was started. The trail was independent of the military communications lines (WAMCATS), although both were being built during the same period, between the same settlements, and in some places were close together. The all-American route was originally to go from Valdez to Fort Egbert on the Yukon. Because of gold strikes around Fairbanks and the growing importance of that area, the main line was diverted at Gulkana (mile 128) and rerouted to Fairbanks. Although the trail was started

by the military and was originally planned to be used as a military road, interest and use by nonmilitary made it a general use route, almost from the beginning. The Valdez to Fairbanks trail eventually developed into the present-day Richardson Highway, named after General Wilds P. Richardson, the man credited with guiding the construction of the route.

LOCATION AND REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

General Alignment

The accompanying maps outline the known trails from Valdez to Fairbanks. The main route and two shorter side routes formed the major trail from Valdez to Fairbanks. All were used during the Gold Rush Era.

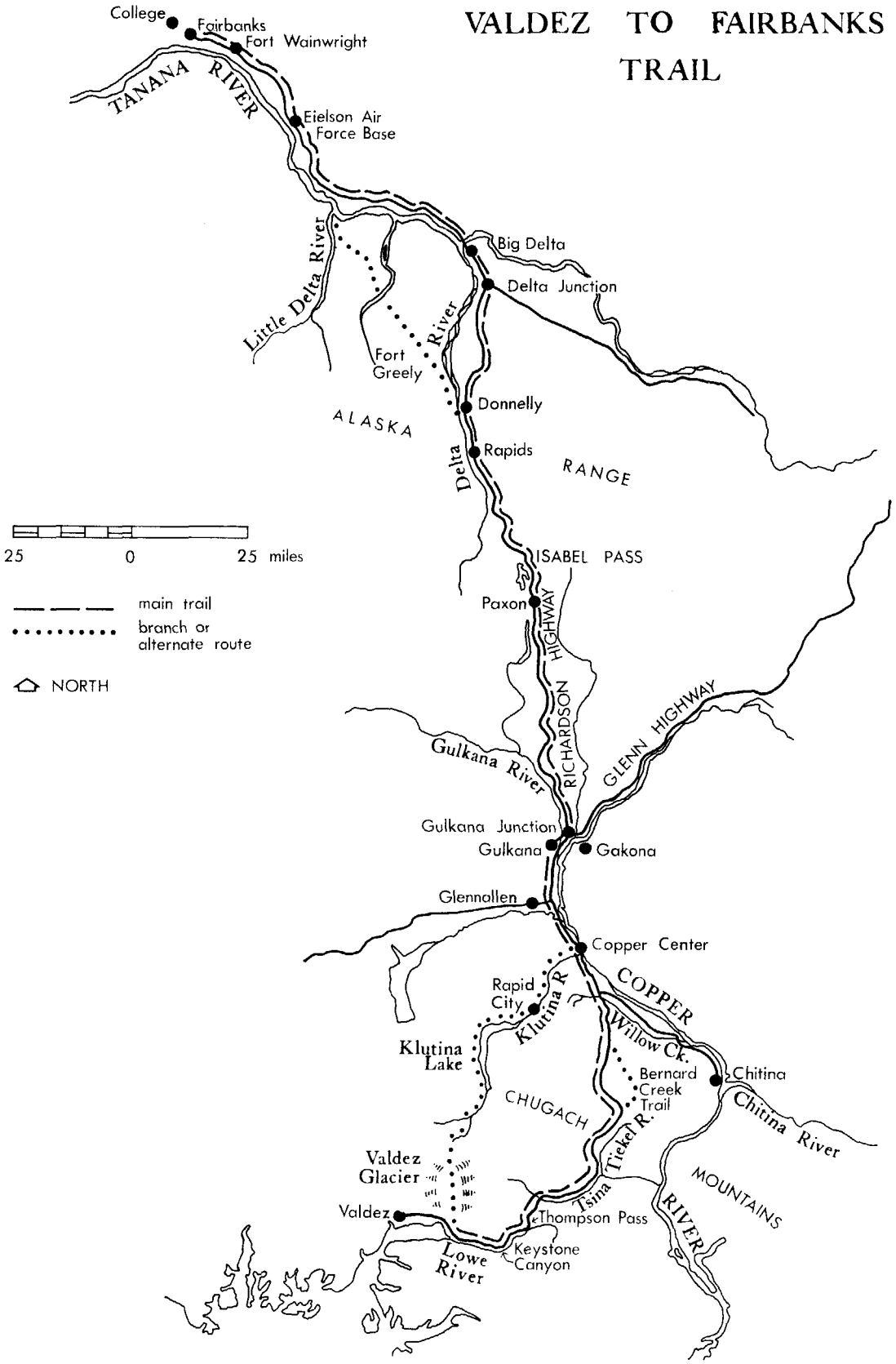
The main Valdez to Fairbanks Trail left Valdez, crossed the Valdez Glacier delta, up through Keystone Canyon, and up the Lowe River valley to Thompson Pass, in the Chugach Mountains. From here, the trail passed through the Tsina River and Tiekel River gorges, and then followed the Tiekel valley crossing the Tonsina River to Willow Creek. Continuing northward, it crossed the Klutina River and paralleled the Copper River. The trail crossed the Tazlina River and followed the west bank of the Copper River to the Gulkana River. It crossed the Gulkana at its mouth, then paralleled this river to its headwaters. The trail went over Isabel Pass, through the Alaska Range, and then along the Big Delta River to its confluence with the Tanana River. The trail crossed to the north bank of the Tanana River and followed the river to Fairbanks.

One of the shorter side routes from the main trail was a winter alternative route along the northern end of the main trail. It was used because it saved 13 miles, was fairly level, and was protected from winter storms. This side route cut off at Little Delta River and headed south to a point approximately 35 miles up the Delta River.

The other major side route was the one first used by the early prospectors in 1896-98 who went to Valdez by ship, planning then to go north via the Copper River to the gold fields. This side route left Valdez, went north across Valdez Glacier and the Chugach Mountains, down Klutina Glacier to Klutina Lake, then by boat down the Klutina River to what was to become Copper Center at the confluence of the Klutina River with the Copper River. At this point, this side route, known as the Valdez Glacier Trail and later called the Death Trail of '98, rejoined the main Valdez to Fairbanks Trail.

An important connecting trail led to the copper fields in the Chitina and Copper River valleys. This connecting trail started at Willow Creek on the Valdez to Fairbanks trail and went southeast approximately 39 miles to the present-day town of Chitina.

VALDEZ TO FAIRBANKS TRAIL



Another connecting trail started in the vicinity of Ernestine Creek on the main trail and went generally north about 25 miles to again connect with the main trail at Tonsina. Known as the Bernard Creek Trail, it crossed Kimball Pass and then followed Bernard Creek to its confluence with the Tonsina River.

Travel on these trails was often difficult. Snow storms and below freezing temperatures in winter and wet, boggy trail conditions in summer on various trail sections created difficult traveling.

Length

The main Valdez to Fairbanks Trail was approximately 365 miles long. Broken into segments, it was approximately 93 miles from Valdez to Willow Creek, 140 miles from Willow Creek to Black Rapids, and 132 miles from Black Rapids to Fairbanks. The Valdez Glacier side trail was approximately 80 miles in length, and the winter cut-off from the Little Delta River up the Big Delta River was approximately 55 miles in length.

Regional Climate, Topography, Vegetation, and Wildlife

The climate along the trail changes, as one proceeds north, from the transitional climatic zone to the continental climatic zone. The transitional zone covers the area on the southern flank of the Chugach Mountain range to and including Valdez. The continental covers the area on the northern flank of the Chugach Mountain range north through the Copper River valley and Tanana River valley to and including Fairbanks.

Precipitation varies greatly in the transitional climatic zone, with annual averages of 60 inches at Valdez and with 100 to 300 percent more precipitation in the mountains than in the lowlands. The precipitation is in the form of snow during the winter months. The first freeze occurs around mid-September and the last freeze about late May. This zone has about 110 frost-free days.

Precipitation in the continental climatic zone is considerably less than in the transitional. Average annual precipitation at Fairbanks is about 11 inches. Record high and low temperatures at Fairbanks are 99°F and -65°F, with a mean daily January temperature of about -16°F and a mean daily July temperature of about 60°F. The first freeze occurs around September 1 and the last freeze around May 20. This zone has about 89 frost-free days.

The area south of the Chugach Mountains is generally free of permafrost; however, north of the Chugach Mountains, the land is underlain by discontinuous permafrost. Generally, throughout this northern area, only those places adjacent to rivers or large bodies of water are free of permafrost.

The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail traversed two of Alaska's major mountain ranges, the Chugach Mountains and the Alaska Range. From sea level at Valdez, the trail climbs immediately up to Thompson Pass at an elevation of 2,771 feet. The adjacent Chugach Mountains rise to elevations of from 4,000 to 8,500 feet. Where the trail runs along the 1,500-foot elevation of the Copper and Gulkana River valleys, peaks of the Wrangell Mountains rise in the east to 16,000 feet. The pass through the Alaska Range, Isabel Pass, divides the Gulkana and Delta River drainages and is 3,000 feet above sea level. Nearby peaks rise to 13,000 feet. The trail then crosses into the Tanana River valley where elevations are much lower, with Fairbanks being about 350 feet. These two mountain ranges along with the two lower valleys form the dominant topographic features along the trail. Both mountain ranges trend east-west while bending in a slightly northerly arc. The rivers and valleys differ, however, with the Gulkana and Copper Rivers flowing south and the Tanana River flowing west-northwest.

Vegetation over the region varies greatly due to topography and the absence or presence of permafrost. The coastal western hemlock-Sitka spruce forest is found up to the 2,000-foot elevation along the coast. Trees common to the area include Sitka spruce, mountain and western hemlock, birch, balsam poplar, and cottonwood. Bottomland spruce-poplar forest is found along the more level flood plains, low river terraces, and more deeply thawed south-facing slopes along the Copper, Tanana, and other major rivers. Characteristic of the vegetation are white spruce, balsam poplar trees, and such shrubs as alder, willow, cottonwood, and high-bush cranberry. The upland spruce-hardwood forest is found generally on the higher portions of the interior valleys. Characteristic trees are white spruce, balsam poplar, cottonwood, birch, aspen, and black spruce. Shrubs include alder, willow, rose, low-bush cranberry, high-bush cranberry, raspberry, and currant. The lowland spruce-hardwood forest is found on areas of shallow peat, glacial deposits, outwash plains, and northerly slopes. Extensive stands of this forest type with its black spruce, white spruce (minor amount), birch, aspen, and balsam poplar trees, are found in the upper Copper River valley and in the Tanana lowlands.

The high brush vegetative system occurs between timberline and alpine tundra in avalanche paths, flood plains, and on old forest burns. A Associated with this system are aspen, birch, and white spruce trees and such shrubs as alder, devil's club, willow, and various berries. The low brush bog and muskeg vegetative system is found in wet, flat basins where tree growth is limited, such as old river terraces, outwashes, and old sloughs. Black spruce and tamarack trees, shrubs such as Labrador tea, willow, resin birch, dwarf Arctic birch, and various berries are common vegetation.

Two types of tundra vegetation are found along the trail. Moist tundra occurs in the Copper River lowland and Gulkana upland and in the rolling

Down the old trail and new highway route from Thompson Pass, north of Valdez.
(Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

foothills on the northern side of the Alaska Range at 2,000- to 4,000-foot elevations. Various shrubs, grasses, and herbs make up this vegetative system.

Alpine tundra is typically found on mountains, including barren rock and rubble areas, alluvial fans, and drier river terraces. It occurs in the Alaska Range and Chugach Mountains. Vegetation in the system includes shrubs such as resin birch, Labrador tea, mountain heather, rhododendron, and berries; also herbs such as avens and moss-campion; and grasses, mosses, lichens, and sedges.

Large game animals are common throughout the trail area. Grizzly bear, black bear, wolves, wolverine, barren ground caribou, bison, moose, and Dall sheep are present in varying populations. Small mammals found are lynx, fox, otter, mink, marten, beaver, muskrat, and snowshoe hare. Important waterfowl nesting areas are located along the Tanana River and Copper River deltas. Raptors found are bald eagles, peregrine falcons, ospreys, goshawks, and several owl and other hawk species.

Land Uses and Access

Permanent settlements along the trail include Valdez, Copper Center, Glennallen, Gulkana, Gakona, Donnelly, Delta Junction, North Pole, Fairbanks, and College. Fairbanks, with the largest population and most development, is the service center for interior Alaska. Most of the lands along the trail are relatively uninhabited. Three military bases are located along the trail--Fort Wainwright (Army) and Eielson (Air Force) near Fairbanks, and Fort Greely (Army) near Delta Junction.

Overlying or closely paralleling the trail is the Richardson Highway, a major paved road. It starts at Valdez and goes north to join the Alcan Highway, another major road, at Delta Junction. The trail originally was to be the main route from southcentral (coastal) Alaska into the interior for communication and other services. It developed from a trail, to a sled/wagon route, to a major highway over a period of 25 years. The Richardson Highway remains today a major north-south route through Alaska. Through the past half century, the highway has typically undergone some realignment, but still follows most of the original Valdez-Fairbanks Trail. The trail length from Valdez to Thompson Pass is the only major portion where the original main trail parallels the highway rather than being overlain or crisscrossed by the highway. The Bernard Creek Trail (connecting trail) is almost as long as the Valdez to Thompson Pass section and is not overlain by a highway.

The Alcan Highway, built during World War II, serves as the only land access to Alaska from the contiguous United States. It is paved in Alaska and graveled through Canada. From Delta Junction to Fairbanks,

the Alcan Highway follows the trail. Both the Richardson and Alcan Highways are heavily used for commercial transport, access between Alaskan towns, and driving for pleasure.

Another major land use is the trans-Alaska oil pipeline which passes through a corridor generally following the trail route. The pipeline corridor goes from the north slope of Alaska through Fairbanks to the south side of Valdez Arm across from the town of Valdez. This corridor varies in width but lies in the general trail area along the entire Valdez-Fairbanks Trail.

The areas considered better for settlements and intensive development along the north half of the trail exist near the highway system on level terraces with suitable soils. Along the south half of the trail, only limited areas are considered suitable for intensive development, mostly in the Copper River valley and along some of its tributaries.

General Land Ownership

Much of the land surrounding Fairbanks and down through the Tanana valley and continuing up to the approximate summit of the Alaska Range is State patented or State selection lands. The exceptions are the limited private lands mainly at Fairbanks, military withdrawn areas, and Native withdrawals in the upper Tanana valley which are mostly outside the trail area, and the utility and transportation corridor south from approximately Delta Junction.

The area from the Alaska Range summit south to the vicinity of Gulkana is mostly Native withdrawal and utility and transportation corridor withdrawal lands. State selection lands and Native withdrawal lands comprise most of the area from Gulkana to just south of Copper Center. Native withdrawal lands, State selection lands (around Valdez), and utility and transportation corridor lands lie between Copper Center and Valdez.

Native land selections continue, and all State land selections are to be made by 1985.

The Valdez to Fairbanks Trail was part of the territorial system of roads and trails, constructed and/or maintained by the Alaska Road Commission using Federal and/or territorial monies. The State of Alaska maintains that a right-of-way still exists in the name of the State along all such roads and trails pursuant to revised Statute 2477 passed by Congress in 1866.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Period and Type of Use

Early explorations by the military were made in the Prince William Sound area and up into the Copper River valley and elsewhere in Alaska in the 1800's. The expressed purpose of these ventures was to gather any and all types of information about the land and people, particularly in the interior areas, since very little information existed.

The discovery of gold in the 1890's, first in the Klondike region of Canada and then in the Fairbanks-Circle-Eagle-Tanana Valley areas and the Copper River area, caused worldwide interest in Alaska and northwestern Canada. The first gold-seekers made their way across the Coastal Mountains via the Dalton Trail, White Pass Trail, and Chilkoot Trail in southeastern Alaska to the Klondike gold fields or traveled by boat up the Yukon River. As further gold discoveries were made elsewhere in Alaska and as increasing numbers of people headed north from Seattle--their minds filled with stories of great riches, giant nuggets, and tons of gold--new routes were sought.

Due to the early military explorations in the area of Prince William Sound, prospectors began leaving Seattle via boats to the Valdez area with the plan of crossing the Chugach Mountain Range to the interior gold fields. False information from unknown sources, probably inspired and expanded upon by gold fevered men in Seattle and based on wild guesses and little fact, was spread about a trail over Valdez Glacier to the interior. The town of Valdez came into being when these prospectors first landed near the future Fort Liscum site in November 1897 and founded Valdez. An estimated 3,500 people landed at Valdez and attempted to cross the Valdez Glacier during the winter of 1897-98. Of this number, only about 260 successfully crossed the glacier and made it to the gold fields. So many died on the trail during that winter that it became known as the Death Trail of '98.

The Valdez Glacier Trail ran from Valdez northeast up and across Valdez Glacier, down Klutina Glacier to Klutina Lake, down the lake, then down the Klutina River through 25 miles of rapids to its confluence with the Copper River. The town of Copper Center was established at the confluence. Valdez Glacier was not the only dangerous trail section; a 25-mile long rapids on the Klutina also took its toll of adventurers. Many prospectors built boats at Klutina Lake and attempted to float to Copper Center. The rapids are reported to have claimed nine of every ten boats. On June 1, 1898, 36 wrecked boats were counted. Many prospectors, upon hearing about these rapids, either lined their boats down or gave up on going to the gold fields. However, in 1898, a trail was established along the Klutina River section which provided an alternative to running the rapids.

After traversing a difficult and dangerous trail and spending a summer and fall working hard in the search for gold, another hardship befell the prospectors in the Copper River valley--scurvy. During the winter of 1898-99, many died of this disease.

Captain Abercrombie, an earlier explorer of Valdez and the Copper River valley, returned to Valdez in the spring of 1899. He had previously searched for an all-American route into the interior from Valdez. His orders, General Order 51 dated March 20, 1899, directed an expedition to proceed to Valdez and from there open a military road to Copper Center. When Captain Abercrombie arrived at Valdez on April 21, 1899, he found over 80 destitute prospectors under the care of Quartermaster Charles Brown, many ill with scurvy. The captain organized a relief station and ended up extending aid to over 500 prospectors.

Captain Abercrombie's crews then set out to build the road to Copper Center. Working hard through the summer and early fall of 1899, they built a rough pack horse trail from Valdez some 93 miles to Willow Creek on the Copper River. Willow Creek was just a few miles south of Copper Center. This rough trail was the forerunner of the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail. The general path of the road ran from the military reservation at Valdez (construction of Fort Liscum started in the spring of 1900), up the Lowe River valley, through Keystone Canyon and Thompson Pass to the Tonsina Valley.

The expedition also reported that it was feasible to construct a railroad from Valdez to the Interior via Keystone Canyon and Thompson Pass. In the early 1900's, a syndicate headed by Morgan-Guggenheim interests searched for a rail route from their Kennicott Copper Mines in the area of the Chitina River, a tributary of the Copper River, to the coast. Surveys were made of the Thompson Pass/Valdez route, but the plan was abandoned in 1906 when the Copper River route was selected. In 1907, other promoters of the Keystone Canyon railway route ended their plans in violent disagreements. A steam locomotive and rails were shipped to Valdez, a line was partially built, as was a tunnel, but a railroad was never constructed over Thompson Pass.

Work continued on the Fort Liscum to Fort Egbert (Eagle) Trail in 1900. The trail was called the Trans-Alaska Military Road, by the military. Congress passed a bill in 1901 appropriating $100,000 for military roads and bridges in Alaska to be expended under the administration of the War Department. Practically all of these funds were spent by Captain Abercrombie on the Fort Liscum to Fort Egbert route which soon became known as the All-American Route to the Klondike and Yukon gold fields. The rough trail was completed between Fort Egbert (Eagle) and Fort Liscum. About 1906, the main trail was diverted at Gulkana (mile 128) by the Road Commission and directed toward Fairbanks. All future trail improvements and developments

were made on the new alignment. The reason for this was the dwindling importance of Eagle and growing importance of Fairbanks on the Tanana River as a service area for the Yukon gold fields.

In 1904, Congress appropriated $25,000 more for surveys and development of the trail into a wagon road. In 1905, Congress supplemented that amount with another $5,700.

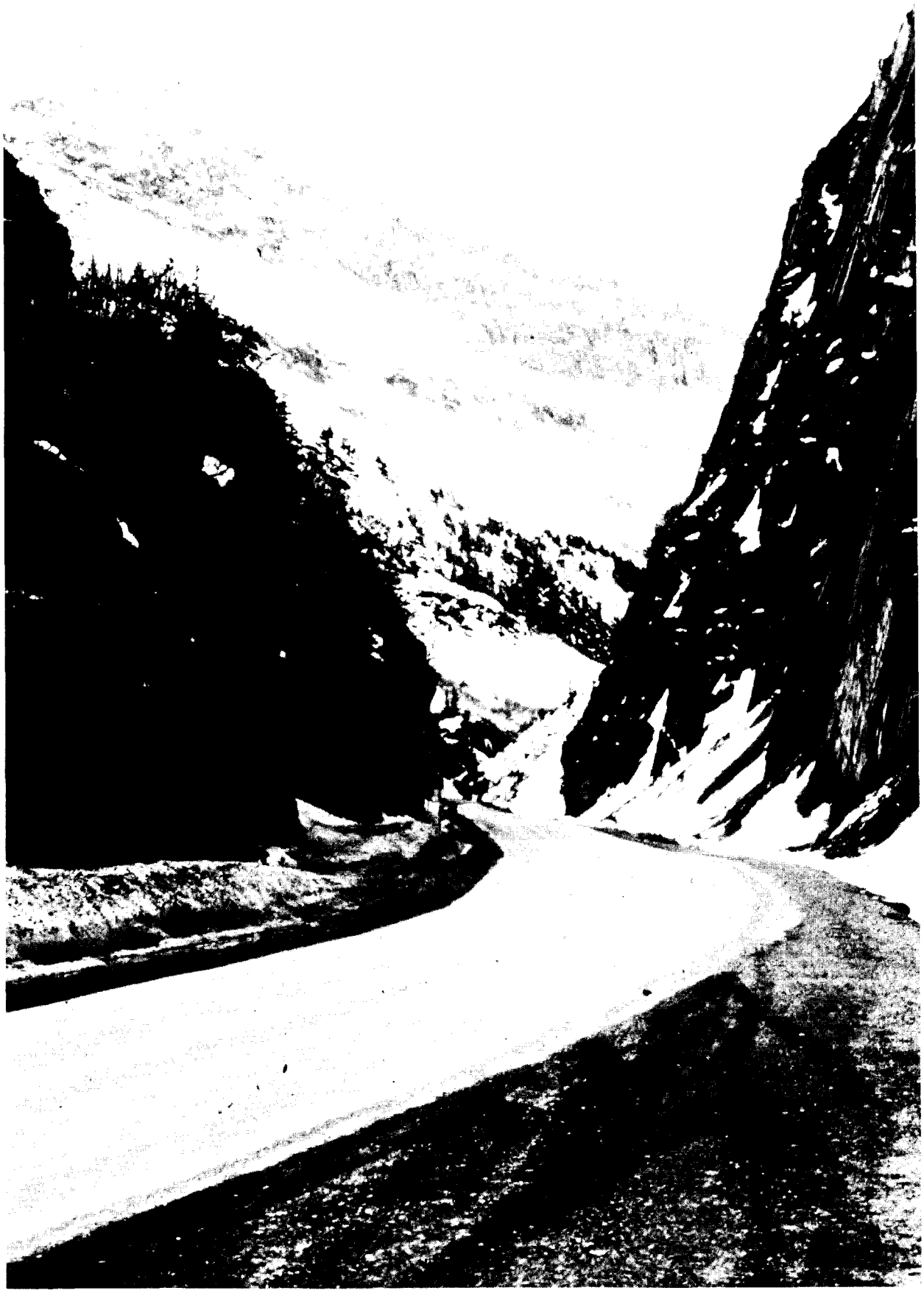
Back in 1902, the Army had sent Captain Wilds P. Richardson on his second tour to Alaska. He was stationed at Fort Seward, near Haines. When Congress directed the Valdez to Fairbanks wagon road survey, the military assigned Captain Richardson to that task, although Major John Mills had already investigated the feasibility of the route in 1905. He accomplished the survey of the approximately 365-mile long route from Valdez to Fairbanks during 1906-07. Congress then created the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) by an Act of January 27, 1905. ARC was under War Department administration and had Congressional authority and funds to survey and construct public wagon roads, trails, and bridges. Captain Richardson was appointed to head the Commission and stayed on from 1905 until leaving for a World War I assignment. In 1906, Congress appropriated $150,000 to begin work on the Valdez-Fairbanks wagon route. A later president of ARC, General James Steese, named the route the Richardson Highway in honor of the man who directed its construction.

Under Captain Richardson's direction, the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail was gradually improved. As early as 1906, at least 1,200 tons of freight and 2,000 people traveled the trail during the winter. In 1910, 3,500 people used the trail and over 2,400 tons of freight were hauled over it. Winter freight was handled by horse-drawn double bobsled. By 1911, it was passable for wheeled vehicles over its entire length. In 1912, over 1,700 head of cattle and sheep were driven over the trail. Another use of the trail was to move the mail. Mail left Valdez on the first and 16th of the month. The usual amount was 200 pounds, which was relayed five times in summer by pack horse and in winter by dogsled.

Eventually, the trail became a highway. During the summer of 1913, the first light automobile traffic traveled from Fairbanks to Valdez. After that event, most traffic over the trail was by motor vehicle. Winter mail was also carried part of the way by motor vehicle, covering 161 miles of the 365-mile long route.

Historic Trail Remnants

Little evidence of the original Valdez to Fairbanks Trail exists today except in the Lowe River valley and Keystone Canyon. As changes in the trail were made, turning it first into a wagon road, then into a motor vehicle route, and finally into a modern highway, major sections of the trail were obliterated. The Richardson Highway now



The present Richardson Highway through Keystone Canyon, north of Valdez, follows the old route. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

traverses much of the original route. However, because of terrain problems in the Lowe River valley and Keystone Canyon, realignments were made as the route was upgraded with the result that portions of the original trail remain intact.

Tools, implements, and equipment hauled over the old trail undoubtedly were lost or abandoned over the years. Such articles dating back to the 1890's and perhaps 1880's may still be present along the trail because of the relatively slow rate of oxidation and decomposition due to low precipitation and low mean annual temperatures along some trail sections.

Related Historic Sites

There are seven existing roadhouses located along the trail. These are Sourdough, Tazlina, Paxson, McCreary's, Poplar Grove, and Big Delta Roadhouses, and Black Rapids' Hunting Lodge. Sourdough Roadhouse is the only one still being used as a roadhouse and has been entered on the National Register of Historic Places. Approximately 56 historic roadhouses were reported to have been built and used along the Valdez to Fairbanks Trail. These are listed in the publication "Alaska's Historic Roadhouses" by Alaska Division of Parks (October 1974). Buildings associated with old Fort Liscum at Valdez still existed in 1974 but were removed when pipeline facilities were constructed at the site. A visitor center is planned at the site to cover the history of Fort Liscum. Remains of buildings and clay fireplaces stand at the abandoned settlement of Black Rapids.

The early towns along the trail still in existence include Valdez, Copper Center, and Fairbanks. Old Valdez was relocated to its present site, a short distance away, after the earthquake of March 1964. Due to the trans-Alaska oil pipeline location, the towns of Valdez and Fairbanks are in a boom situation.

Historical Significance

By comparison with the Yukon, Klondike, and other gold mining areas, the Copper River valley was not a major gold producer, nor did it attract as many people as the other areas. By 1970, the Copper River district had produced over 300,000 ounces of placer gold valued at more than $7.5 million, in comparison with the Fairbanks district which had produced just over 7,900,000 ounces valued at $250,300,000. However, other minerals, such as copper, proved to be an attraction only slightly less important.

Trail use to the various gold fields was light in relation to other trails of the period. Whereas over 22,000 people were reported to have crossed over the Chilkoot Pass Trail in 1897-98, only about 3,500 traveled over the Valdez Glacier Trail, and only a handful knew and used the route across Thompson Pass prior to 1897-98.

Although gold was the initial pulling force, the existence and importance of the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail continued because it was the route located entirely within Alaska. It started as a military trail to serve in protecting and establishing law and order and to aid in the passage of supplies and mail to the prospectors in the interior. It quickly became a public use route. As Alaska's population grew and other things drew people to Alaska, the trail was developed to serve Alaskans as the major multi-purpose road to the interior.

PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE TRAIL USES

Present Trail Condition

Neither the main Valdez-Fairbanks Trail nor the winter alternate routes between the Little Delta and Delta Rivers or the Valdez Glacier Trail are currently being maintained as trails. Use of the main trail is obviously limited to motor vehicle use because the Richardson Highway covers most of the old trail. The only exception is in parts of the Lowe River valley and Keystone Canyon where the highway was not built over the trail. The Valdez Glacier Trail remains much as it was in the past. Since most of this trail crossed glaciers and waterways and is in an area not intensively used, little has changed its character. The Bernard Creek Trail receives some recreation use, while remaining essentially as it was during the Gold Rush period.

Scenic and Recreational Qualities

The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail offers a wide range of scenic vistas. Valdez, fronting on an arm of Prince William Sound and surrounded on other sides by the Chugach Mountains, is an area of spectacular beauty. Many of the rivers along the route, most notably the Lowe, Gulkana, and Delta, have high value.

Keystone Canyon, Thompson Pass, and Isabel Pass add further variety. The Alaska Range includes even more rugged peaks than the Chugach Range, including many of the highest mountains in North America. On the other hand, the Tanana River valley and parts of the Copper River valley lack distinctive visual appeal.

Most of the broad region extending between Valdez and Fairbanks has retained a wilderness character. The exceptions are along the route itself because of the Richardson Highway, the several towns strung out along the highway, and the trans-Alaska oil pipeline. Opportunities for recreating and viewing animals and plant communities in a natural setting are good.

Recreational Uses

The most significant recreation uses occurring along the route of the historic trail are driving for pleasure and sightseeing. Many nontrail-related recreation opportunities also are being enjoyed in the general area. State and/or Federal campgrounds are located near Gakona, Paxson, and Valdez. Fishing is good to excellent in the Gulkana, Delta, and Klutina Rivers and the tributaries to the Copper River, as well as nearby lakes. The Gulkana, Delta, and Copper Rivers offer recreational boating. Snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, hiking, and snowshoeing can be enjoyed along various sections of the trail area. Sport hunting, as well as subsistence hunting, and trapping occur throughout the trail area. The State of Alaska's Division of Parks has plans for a large state park within Keystone Canyon.

Nonrecreational Uses

The most significant, nonrecreation use of the trail route is the Richardson Highway. Another nonrecreation use of the trail area is the trans-Alaska oil pipeline. Future selections of public domain lands by Natives and the State could result in additional nonrecreation land use along the route.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Qualification for National Scenic Trail Designation

The criteria used in evaluating the Valdez to Fairbanks Trail were as follows:

Criterion: Because of their special characteristics, National Scenic Trails should be nationally significant and be capable of attracting visitors from throughout the United States.

Finding: The overland trail from Valdez to Fairbanks and its surrounding gold fields and to the Copper River gold fields was traveled very lightly, even during the boom years. The Copper River district was quite modest in terms of numbers of stampeders, miners, and amount of production in comparison to other gold districts in Alaska, particularly the Fairbanks district. The high scenic values along portions of the route are of national significance and capable of attracting visitors from throughout the United States.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails are designated for hiking and other compatible uses. The National Trails System Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment on these trails except in certain circumstances.

Finding: The existence of the Richardson Highway over much of the historic trail route is a fact of life. Being a highway, motorized

equipment is used on it. The development nearby of the oil pipeline is also incompatible with national scenic trail designation.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails of historical importance should adhere as accurately as possible to their principal historic routes.

Finding: The historic route of the Valdez to Fairbanks Trail is locatable and could be adhered to even though much of the route has been overlain by the Richardson Highway.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be provided with adequate public access through connecting local or regional trails. Access should be located at reasonable intervals to provide for trips of various lengths.

Finding: Due to the Richardson Highway, access is readily available along almost the entire route.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be primarily land based.

Finding: The route from Valdez to Fairbanks is land based.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be of sufficient length to encompass and provide appropriate access to the resources which are a basis for the trails designation.

Finding: The main historic trail was approximately 365 miles long. Secondary routes add an additional 135 miles.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be continuous except where no practicable or feasible interconnection exists.

Finding: A continuous trail following the historic route is not possible because the Richardson Highway has been superimposed over most of the distance.

Conclusions

Because the trail is overlain for the most part by a major highway, is paralleled by an oil pipeline, and does not have high potential for development as a hiking or similar use trail, its designation as a National Scenic Trail is not warranted. The trail was not as important as other routes during the Gold Rush Era.

Recommendations

It is recommended that no further consideration be given to the Valdez to Fairbanks route as a potential National Historic or National Scenic Trail. However, the various Federal and State agencies should continue to plan and develop, as needed, appropriate areas adjacent to the trail

route, including trails from the Richardson Highway which would follow short segments of the historic route where possible, particularly in the Lowe River Valley, Keystone Canyon, and Bernard Creek Trail areas. These segments may qualify for designation as National Recreation Trails. Interpretation of the historic trail through the use of roadside markers along the Richardson Highway should also be considered.

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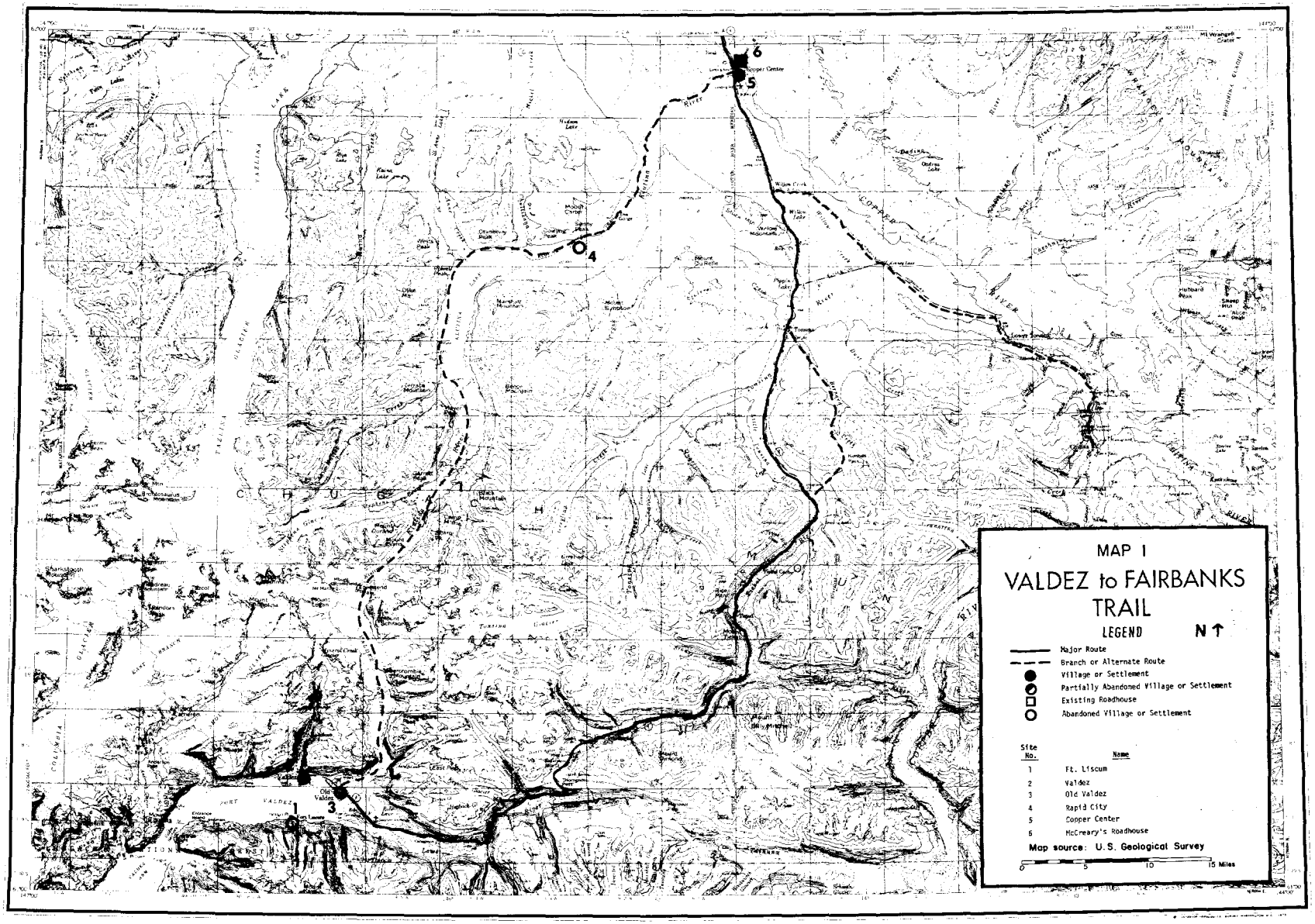
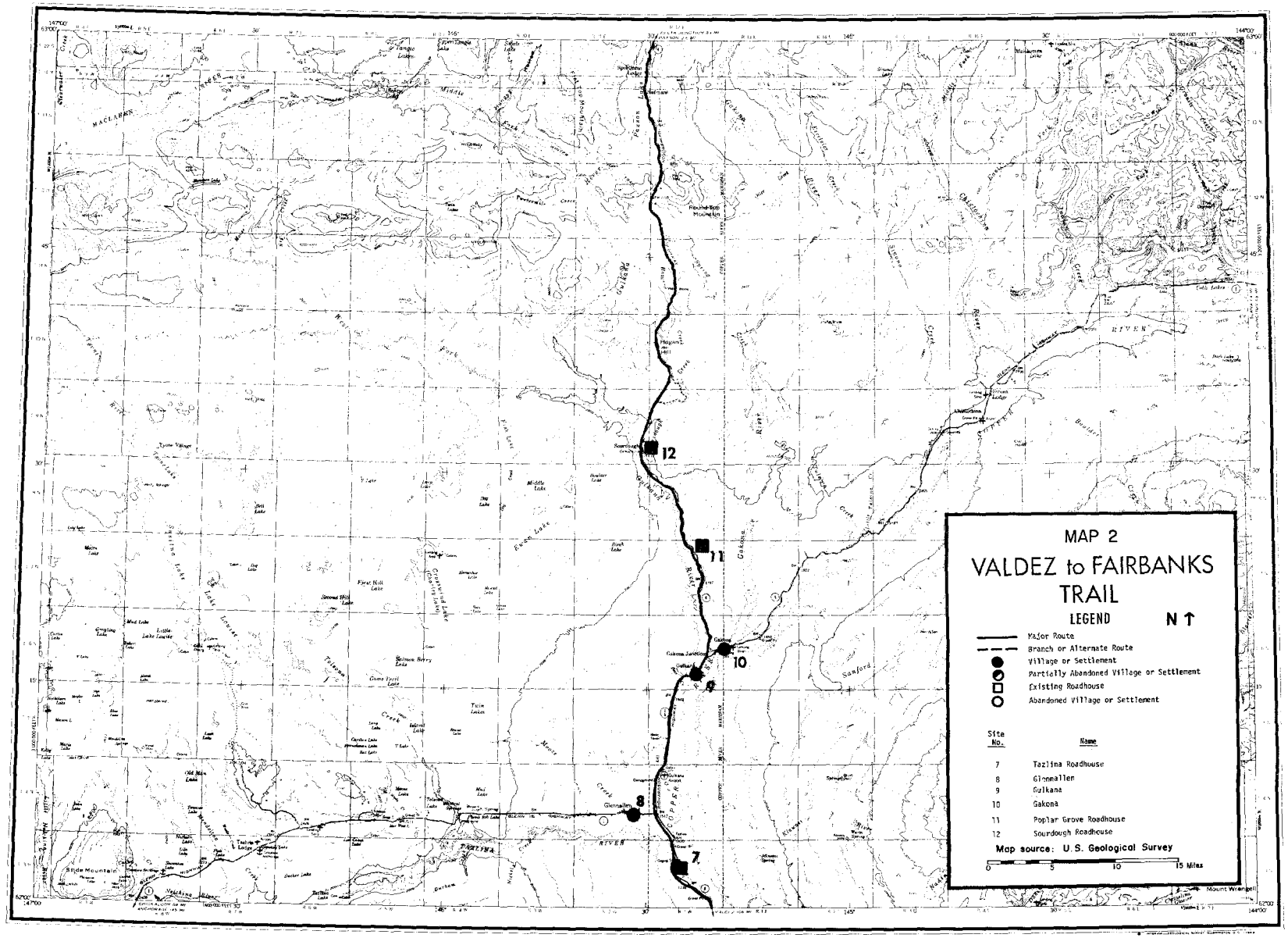
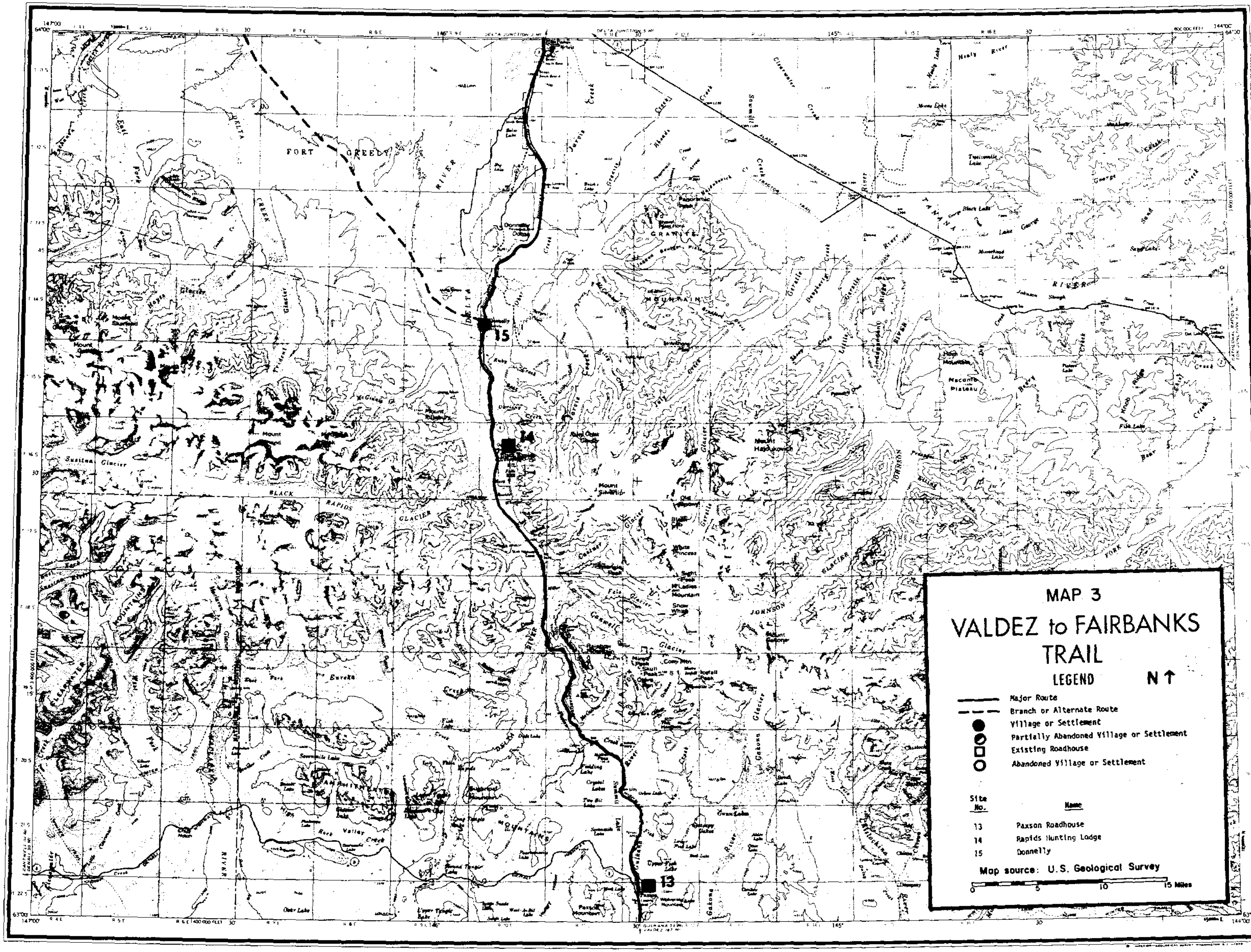
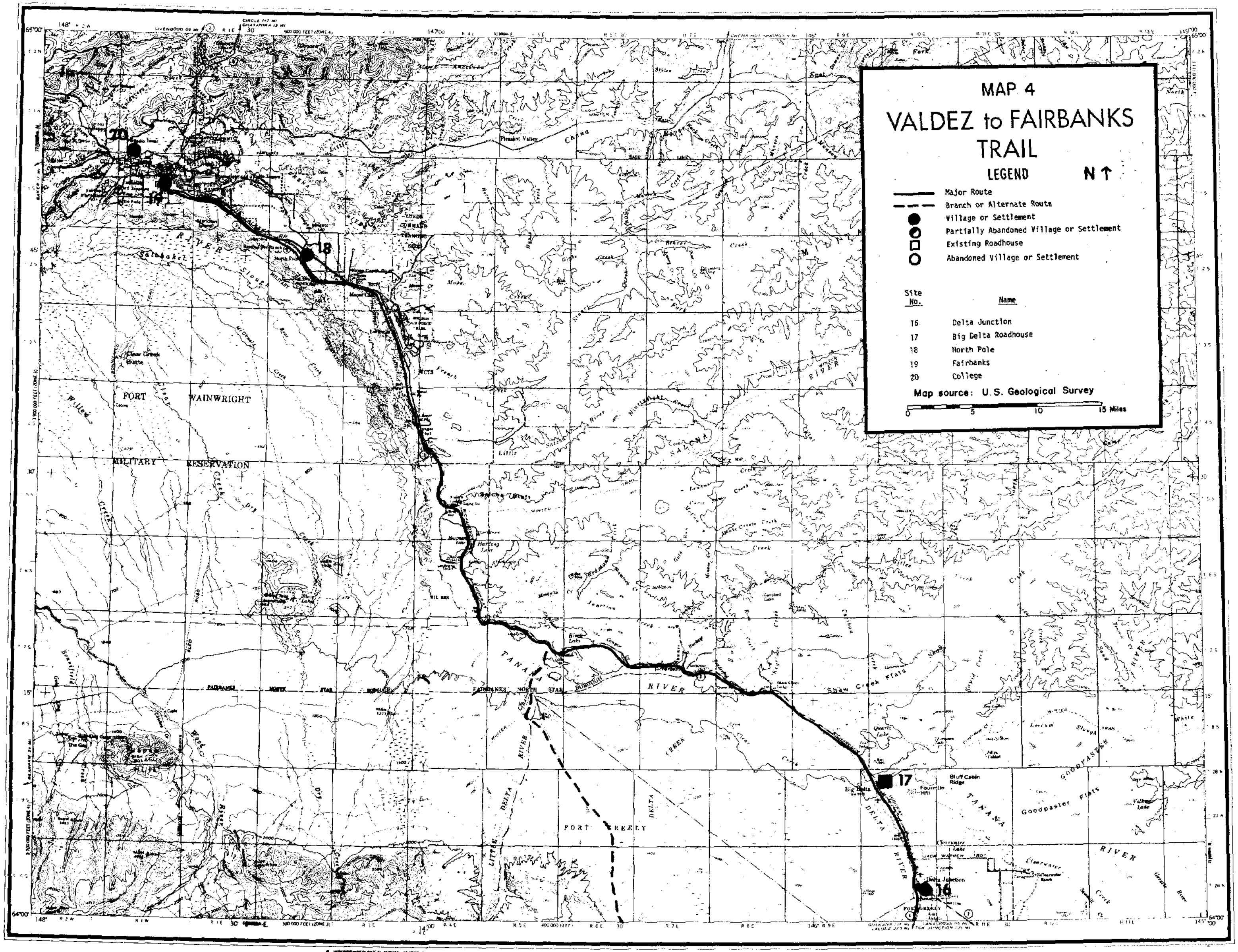

MAP 1
VALDEZ to FAIRBANKS TRAIL
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Village or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Village or Settlement
Existing Roadhouse
Abandoned Village or Settlement
Site No. Name
1 Ft. Liscum
2 Valdez
3 Old Valdez
4 Rapid City
5 Copper Center
6 McCreary's Roadhouse
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles

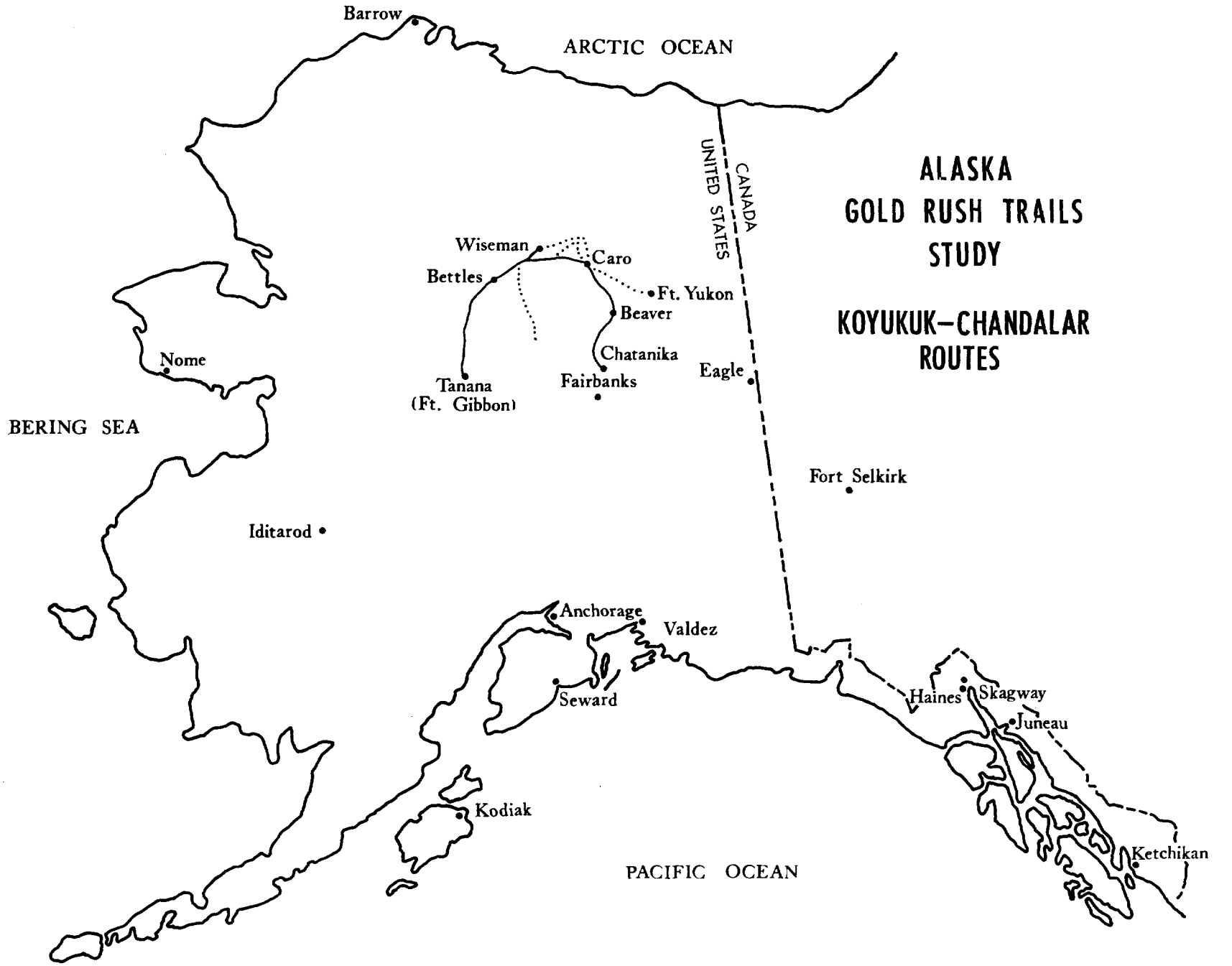

MAP 2
VALDEZ to FAIRBANKS TRAIL
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Village or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Village or Settlement
Existing Roadhouse
Abandoned Village or Settlement
Site No. Name
7 Tazlina Roadhouse
8 Glennallen
9 Gulkana
10 Gakona
11 Poplar Grove Roadhouse
12 Sourdough Roadhouse
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles
MACLAREN
RIVER
Slide Mountain
Mount Wrangell


MAP 3
VALDEZ to FAIRBANKS TRAIL
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Village or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Village or Settlement
Existing Roadhouse
Abandoned Village or Settlement
Site No.
Name
13 Paxson Roadhouse
14 Rapids Hunting Lodge
15 Donnelly
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles
FORT GREELY
DELTA RIVER
TANANA RIVER
BLACK RAPIDS GLACIER
Mount Hajdukovich
Paxson Mountain
15
14
13



MAP 4
VALDEZ to FAIRBANKS TRAIL
LEGEND
N ↑
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Village or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Village or Settlement
Existing Roadhouse
Abandoned Village or Settlement
Site No.
Name
16 Delta Junction
17 Big Delta Roadhouse
18 North Pole
19 Fairbanks
20 College
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles
FORT WAINWRIGHT
MILITARY RESERVATION
TANANA RIVER
SALCHA RIVER
DELTA RIVER
FORT GREELY
Shaw Creek Flats
Goodpaster Flats
Big Delta
Delta Junction

Koyukuk - Chandalar Routes


Barrow
ARCTIC OCEAN
CANADA
UNITED STATES
ALASKA
GOLD RUSH TRAILS
STUDY
KOYUKUK–CHANDALAR
ROUTES
Wiseman
Caro
Bettles
Ft. Yukon
Beaver
Chatanika
Nome
Tanana
(Ft. Gibbon)
Fairbanks
Eagle
BERING SEA
Fort Selkirk
Iditarod
Anchorage
Valdez
Seward
Haines
Skagway
Juneau
Kodiak
Ketchikan
PACIFIC OCEAN

KOYUKUK - CHANDALAR ROUTES

BACKGROUND

Lieutenant Henry T. Allen of the U. S. Army conducted the first official exploration in the upper Koyukuk River drainage. In 1885, he crossed overland from the Yukon River along the divide between the Tozitna and Melozitna Rivers, down the Kanuti River, and then up the Koyukuk River as far north as the John River confluence. That same year, Lt. Cantwell of the U. S. Revenue Marine Service traveled up the Koyukuk by steamer, then took skin boats up the Alatna River and portaged over into the Kobuk River drainage.

John Bremner, who had accompanied Allen on his expedition through Alaska, and a partner, Peter (or Peder) Johnson, were the first known prospectors in the upper Koyukuk in 1887. Although not documented, some people believe they found gold at Tramway Bar on the Middle Fork during that year. However, it was not until 1893 that the first paying gold was reported to be taken at Tramway Bar.

Between 1887 and 1897, only 18 to 20 prospectors were reported in the upper Koyukuk region. During that time, small amounts of gold were taken out of the Tramway Bar area and in the South Fork drainage.

With the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898, over 1,000 persons are reported to have taken steamers up the Koyukuk in search of gold in the upper drainage. Most were soon discouraged by the absence of bonanzas and by the remote, inhospitable country; and, according to Robert Marshall, author of Arctic Village, only 200 persons wintered over in the upper Koyukuk that year (Schrader reports 500 to 600) in the new towns of Arctic City, Bergman, Peavy, and camps along the South Fork.

When travel permitted in the spring of 1899, more left the Koyukuk district. Those who stayed were the more seasoned prospectors and their persistence quickly paid off when new strikes were made later that year on Slate Creek and Myrtle Creek, tributaries of the Middle Fork. Two new towns were founded: Slate Creek at that creek's confluence with the Middle Fork, and Bettles located just below the John River confluence.

In 1900, Bettles largely replaced the downstream town of Bergman as the major supply point for the upriver placer mines. The town of Slate Creek became known as Coldfoot, named after a cheechako, or newcomer, who upon reaching the Slate Creek diggings got cold feet and turned back.

Over the next few years, several hundred miners worked the placers of the Coldfoot area and in the North Fork and South Fork drainages of the Koyukuk. In 1906, a gold strike was made in the Chandalar district to the east and several hundred men, many from the upper Koyukuk, rushed to the new diggings around Chandalar Lake.

A new town of Caro was founded on the Chandalar River at Flat Creek. However, the cabins were deserted within 2 or 3 years and fewer than 50 men remained in the district when little gold was recovered.

During the winter of 1907-08, new gold discoveries were made on Nolan Creek north of Coldfoot and a reported 200 men rushed to the Koyukuk during the spring of 1908. In 1911, at about the time when the richer surface placers were nearly exhausted, deep placers were discovered in the Hammond River area. Spawned by this strike and continued activity in the Nolan Creek area, Wright's roadhouse at the confluence of Wiseman Creek and the Middle Fork grew into the town of Nolan. Mining in the Coldfoot area had declined steadily over several years and postal service was discontinued to Coldfoot in 1912. In 1923, the Nolan Post Office was officially renamed Wiseman, after the creek.

The primary mode of transportation to and from the Koyukuk district was by boat up and down the Koyukuk. However, some overland travel took place, especially in the winter months, and several trails were established. All the major overland routes began at various settlements along the Yukon River. An early route left Fort Yukon, followed the Chandalar River (originally reported as Chandlar) upriver, crossed a divide, and followed Slate Creek down to Coldfoot. Another early route left the Yukon near Fort Hamlin (downstream of Stevens Village), followed the Dall River upriver, crossed the divide to the South Fork of the Koyukuk, and then traversed the South Fork headwaters to Slate Creek and Coldfoot.

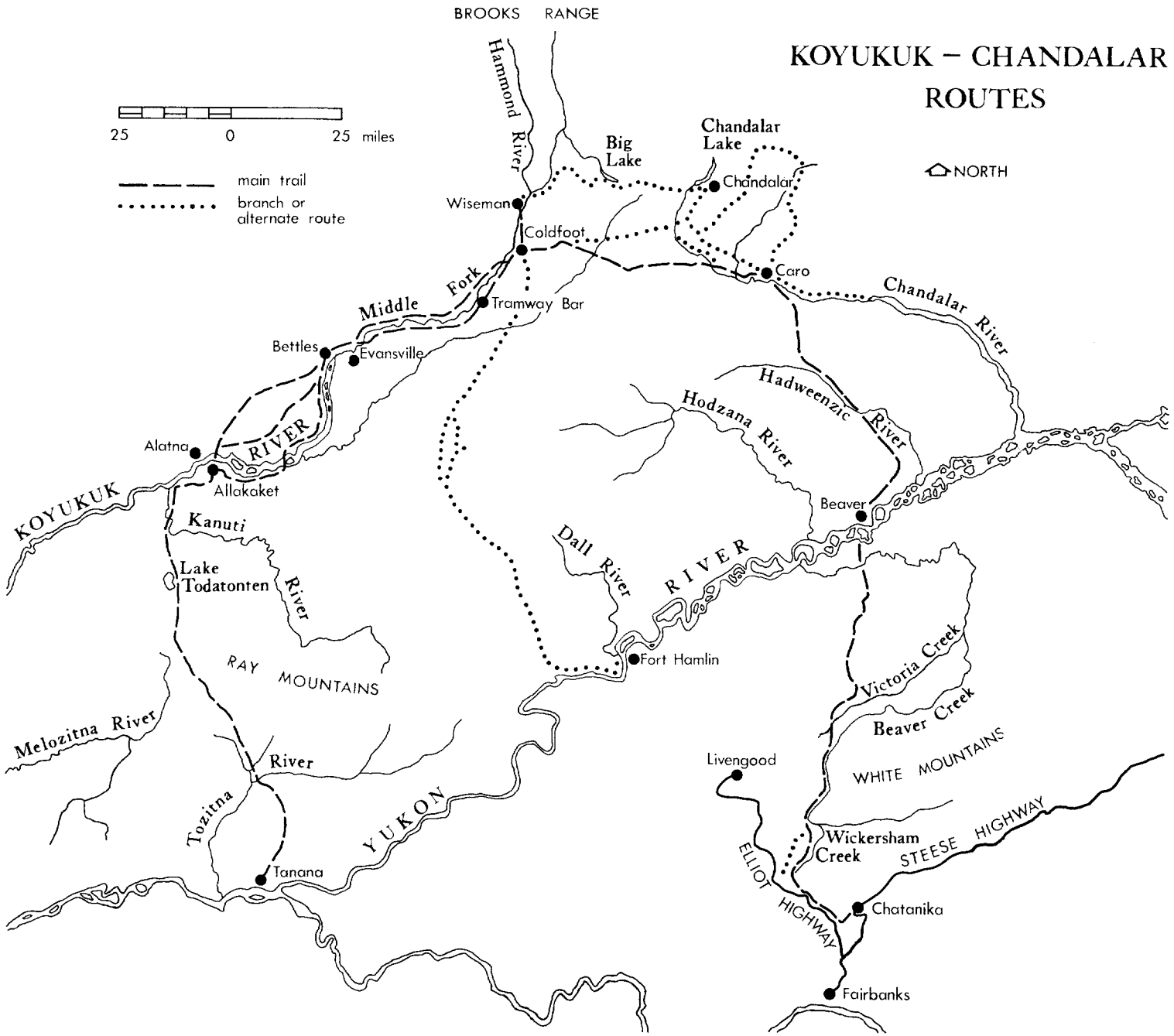
A somewhat later route established by the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) left the Yukon at Fort Gibbon at the confluence of the Tanana and went up the Tozitna River drainage, into Kanuti drainage, and then followed the Koyukuk upriver from near Allakaket to Bettles, Coldfoot, and Nolan. Another trail established by the Alaska Road Commission went north from Beaver on the Yukon to Caro on the Chandalar and then connected with local trails to mines in the Chandalar district and with the trail up the Chandalar River to the Koyukuk district. Trails also connected Fort Gibbon and Beaver with Fairbanks.

LOCATION AND REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

General Alignment

The accompanying maps outline the known trails to the Koyukuk district or Wiseman area, and the adjacent Chandalar district.

Only two of these routes, both built by the Alaska Road Commission, can be considered major trails of the Gold Rush Era. The so-called Fort Gibbon-Koyukuk Trail left the Yukon River at Fort Gibbon, followed the Tozitna River, then its tributary Dagislakha Creek, over a divide and up the Melozitna River, past Lake Todatonten, down the Kanuti River, and up the Koyukuk to Allakaket, Bettles, Coldfoot, and Nolan (Wiseman).


KOYUKUK – CHANDALAR ROUTES
BROOKS RANGE
25 0 25 miles
main trail
branch or alternate route
NORTH
Hammond River
Wiseman
Big Lake
Chandalar Lake
Chandalar
Coldfoot
Caro
Chandalar River
Middle Fork
Tramway Bar
Bettles
Evansville
Hadweenzic River
Hodzana River
Alatna
RIVER
Allakaket
KOYUKUK
Kanuti
Beaver
Dall River
RIVER
Lake Todatonten
River
Fort Hamlin
Victoria Creek
Beaver Creek
RAY MOUNTAINS
Melozitna River
River
Livengood
WHITE MOUNTAINS
Tozitna
YUKON
Wickersham Creek
STEESE HIGHWAY
ELLIOT HIGHWAY
Tanana
Chatanika
Fairbanks

The trail was rerouted at least twice to make a more direct route between Allakaket and Bettles and was rerouted to follow better terrain on the north side of the Middle Fork between Bettles and Coldfoot.

The other major trail extended from Beaver north across the Hadweenzic River and over the Chandalar River divide to Caro. From Caro, several trails led to local mining areas. A connecting trail was also established from Chatanika (later Olnes), which was linked to Fairbanks by a road and railroad, down Wickersham Creek to Beaver Creek, across Victoria Creek, over the divide, and across the Yukon Flats to Beaver.

In several areas such as alpine or marshy places, tripods or stakes were used to mark a route. Most of these had to be replaced regularly and trail alignments could vary by as much as a mile from year to year. Similarly, winter travel was greatly influenced by local conditions and trail locations were readily altered from year to year if better conditions existed nearby.

Length

Table V gives the approximate mileage of the various trail segments.

The Fort Gibbon-Koyukuk Trail was 273 miles long from the present-day town of Tanana to Nolan (Wiseman). The route from Chatanika to Caro was 195 miles long.

Regional Climate, Topography, Vegetation, and Wildlife

The climate of the Koyukuk and Chandalar regions, similar to that of much of interior Alaska, is described as subarctic continental. Winters are long, dark, and severe beginning with freeze-up in early October of the lakes and streams and ending with break-up usually in May. Snowfall ranges from 50 to 80 inches annually, although heavier amounts may occur at higher elevations. Extended periods of $-40^{\circ}F$ to $-60^{\circ}F$ are common during the winter and $-80^{\circ}F$ has been recorded in recent years at Coldfoot. Due to its location above the Arctic Circle and to surrounding mountains, Wiseman receives no direct sunlight from the first week in December through the first week in January.

Summers are in complete contrast to winters with warm temperatures and little, if any, darkness. Temperatures in the 70's and 80's are common and occasional readings in the 90's have been reported. Most of the 10 to 20 inches of annual precipitation over the region falls in the summer months in the form of rain. Although freezing temperatures have been reported in all months except July in most areas, a frost-free season generally extends from the first of June to the end of August.

Permafrost, either continuous or discontinuous, underlies much of the region except along streams and on some favorable south-facing slopes.

TABLE V. Mileages of Various Trail Segments: Koyukuk - Chandalar Routes

	MILES	
Major Segments		
Fort Gibbon (Tanana) - Allakeket - Bettles - Coldfoot - Nolan (Wiseman)	273	
Chatanika - Beaver - Caro	195	
Subtotal		468
Other Segments		
Caro - Flat Creek (to Little Squaw Creek)	45	
Caro - Coldfoot (via West Fork)	85	
Caro - Coldfoot (via Crooked Creek)	90	
Caro - Big Creek (to Little Squaw Creek)	48	
Caro - Chandalar Lake	50	
Chandalar Lake - Little Squaw Creek	60	
Fort Yukon - Caro	15	
Fort Hamlin - Coldfoot	110	
Subtotal		503
Connecting Trails and Roads		
Fairbanks - Fort Gibbon	120	
Fairbanks - Chatanika (by railroad)	32	
Subtotal		152
TOTAL		1,123

North of Bettles and Caro, the hills and rugged mountains of the Brooks Range dominate the landscape. Relief is great with peaks rising 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the many broad, glacially-carved valleys which lace the range. The elevation of Caro is approximately 1,000 feet, Wiseman 1,200 feet, and Bettles (new town) about 650 feet.

The Kanuti Flats is the dominant topographic feature between Bettles and the Kanuti River. Relief is generally low with occasional hills and ridges rising 1,000 to 1,200 feet in elevation.

The Ray Mountains and associated hills to the west divide the waters flowing into the Koyukuk from those rivers flowing south directly into the Yukon, such as the Melozitna and Tozitna. These mountains and hills are much less rugged than those of the Brooks Range, having more gently sloping sides and little exposed rock surfaces. The divide crossed by the Fort Gibbon-Koyukuk Trail is approximately 1,200 feet in elevation, although nearby peaks in the Ray Mountains rise to over 3,000 feet. After dropping down into the low valley of the Tozitna River, the trail climbs to over 2,000 feet before dropping down to the present town of Tanana along the Yukon River (elevation about 200 feet).

South of Caro, the Beaver-Caro Trail climbs to over 2,400 feet in crossing the rounded low mountains which form the divide between the Chandalar River and the Hadweenzic River drainage. Nearby mountains rise to only several hundred feet above the trail. Between this divide and Beaver, relief is moderate with the trail intersecting east-west trending ridges and tributaries of the Hadweenzic.

The village of Beaver is located in an immense area known as the Yukon Flats at an elevation of 362 feet. The White Mountains separate the Yukon Flats from the Tanana River lowlands of the Fairbanks area. After crossing the Flats, the old Chatanika-Beaver Trail climbs to over 2,000 feet in crossing the Victoria and Beaver Creek drainages. The Chatanika area north of Fairbanks is characterized by high hills and ridges rising 1,000 to 2,000 feet above stream valleys.

Vegetation over the region varies greatly due to topography and the absence or presence of permafrost. Along the Koyukuk River and its upper tributaries and along the Tozitna River, a bottomland spruce-poplar forest is found. Major trees include white spruce and balsam poplar. On gently rising slopes above the river valleys, an upland spruce-hardwood forest generally exists consisting of the various tree species, but dominated by large areas of black spruce and open marsh or muskeg. Alpine and moist tundra are found in the higher divide area between the Kanuti and Tozitna drainages, just north of Tanana, and on many of the mountain slopes in the Brooks Range. Treeline generally ranges between 2,000 and 2,500 feet.

The mountain area between Wiseman and Chandalar Lake is largely vegetated with tundra and willow plants with only occasional sparse stands of white spruce. South of Chandalar Lake, the river valleys of the Chandalar River drainage are largely covered by either a bottomland spruce-poplar forest or an upland spruce-hardwood forest.

A short section of alpine tundra is crossed in the divide between the Chandalar and Hadweenzic Rivers. Heavy upland spruce-hardwood and lowland spruce-hardwood forests dominate the area north and south of Beaver with an intervening section of bottomland spruce-poplar forest along the trail route to Chatanika.

Large game animals are common throughout the region, although most populations are sparse in relation to land area because of the harsh climatic conditions and absence of available winter food. Caribou, moose, Dall sheep, black bear, brown/grizzly bear, and wolves are locally present in varying populations. Small fur-bearers including lynx, beaver, mink, land otter, weasel, marten, and muskrat are abundant over much of the region at lower elevations.

Important waterfowl nesting areas are located in the Kanuti Flats and Yukon Flats. Common raptors in the region include northern bald eagle, golden eagle, osprey, rough-legged hawk, goshawk, marsh hawk, great horned owl, great grey owl, and others. Gyrfalcons are occasionally observed in the higher regions of the Brooks Range and the endangered peregrine falcon is present in the region.

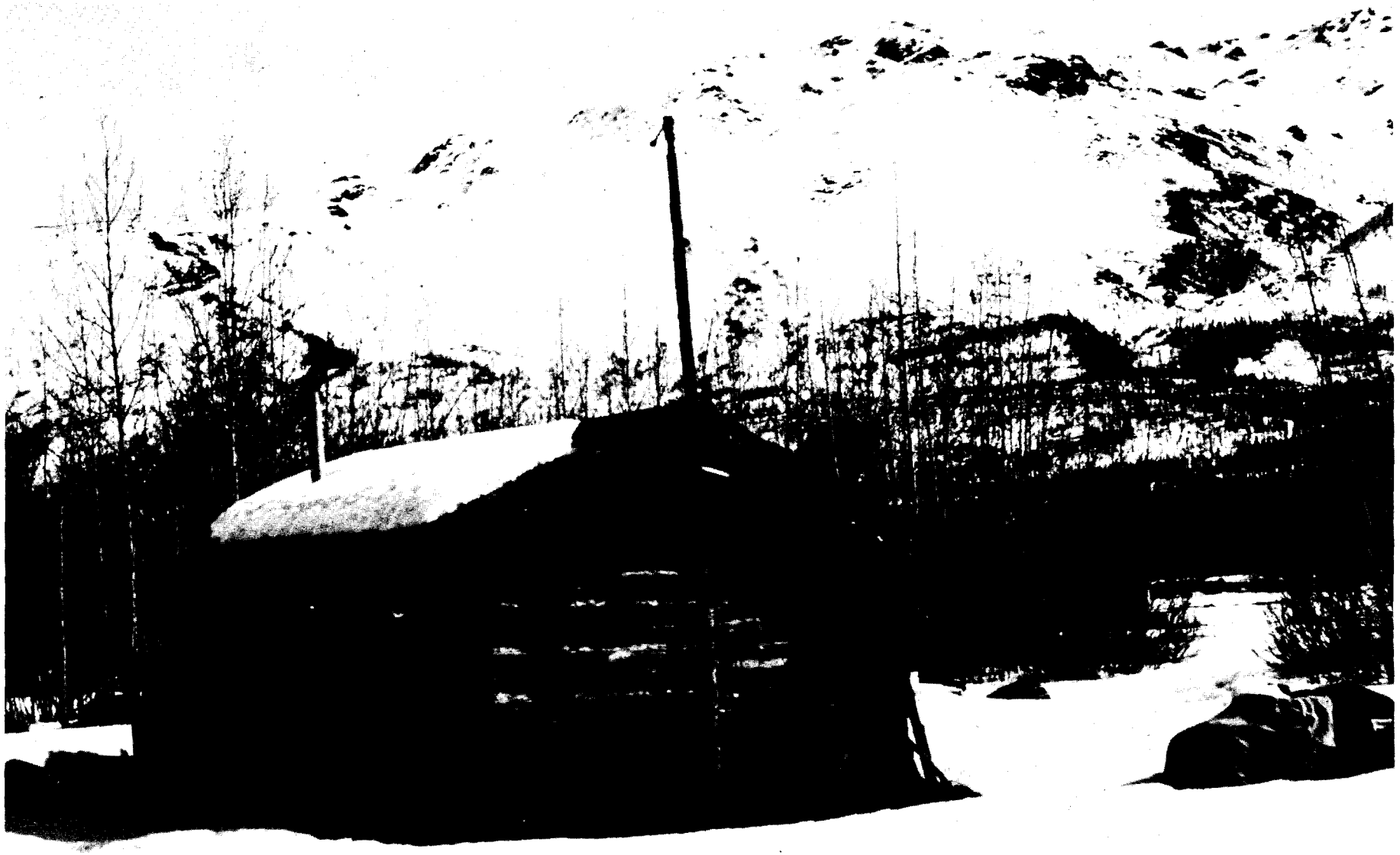
During the summer, mosquitoes and biting flies are extremely numerous. Even repellents and head nets cannot fully protect one at times from the endless attack.

Land Uses and Access

The only permanent settlements in the areas of the historic routes are Tanana, Allakaket, Bettles, Wiseman, and Beaver. Little land has been cleared and most of the routes traverse an uninhabited, primitive environment. Hunting, fishing, trapping, berry-picking, log cutting, and other subsistence-oriented activities are taking place around these villages.

A small amount of mining still occurs in the Wiseman area and around Chandalar Lake. Tractor trails in these areas link camps and airstrips with mining and prospecting areas.

In 1975, an all-weather gravel road was completed, roughly following the old Dall Creek Trail from the Fort Hamlin area north to Coldfoot, up the Middle Fork, past Wiseman, and over Dietrich Pass to the north slope. Several construction camps are located along this road between the Yukon River and Dietrich Pass, and at Coldfoot. These camps have been used in the construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline. The



One of several residences at Wiseman. The pipeline haul road passes at the base of the mountain in the background. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

road parallels the pipeline and connects with the existing Elliott Highway from Fairbanks at Livengood.

Tanana, Allakaket, Bettles, and Beaver are served by regular commercial air service and many additional airstrips for bush pilots exist in the region. The pipeline camps are also presently served by commercial air service. Charter air service is available at Bettles.

General Land Ownership

Virtually all of the land traversed by the several routes to the upper Koyukuk and Chandalar areas is currently in Federal ownership, managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Twenty-five townships surrounding the villages of Bettles (Evansville), Allakaket, Tanana, and Beaver have been withdrawn for Native selection. Between the Native selection areas of Tanana and Allakaket, much of the route area has been classified as public interest lands under Section 17(d)(1) of ANCSA. Much of the White Mountains area is similarly classified. These (d)(1) lands are withdrawn from all forms of appropriation under the public land laws, including the mining and mineral leasing laws except for the location of metalliferous minerals.

The Middle Fork of the Koyukuk Valley has been withdrawn as a utility corridor. The Chandalar area east of the utility corridor within the Brooks Range has largely been selected by the State of Alaska and is pending receipt of patent.

Between the Chandalar River and the White Mountains, much of the route area has been withdrawn under Section 17(d)(2) of ANCSA and is proposed for inclusion in the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge. These lands are withdrawn from all forms of appropriation. A similar (d)(2) corridor, 2 miles wide, has been withdrawn along Beaver Creek within the White Mountains. This river is proposed for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

In the Chatanika area and south to Fairbanks, lands have been either patented to the State or are pending transfer of patent from the Federal government.

An area of the central Brooks Range immediately adjacent to the west boundary of the utility corridor is classified under (d)(2) and has been proposed for inclusion in the Gates of the Arctic National Park. This proposed parkland encompasses lands in the North Fork of the Koyukuk drainage within about 10 miles of Wiseman.

Native land selections continue, action on proposed additions to the national conservation system are to be taken by December 1978, and all State land selections made by 1985.

The Fort Gibbon-Koyukuk Trail, the Chatanika-Beaver Trail, the Beaver-Caro Trail, and the Caro-Coldfoot Trail were part of the territorial system of roads and trails and were constructed and maintained by the Alaska Road Commission using Federal and/or territorial money. The State of Alaska maintains that a right-of-way still exists in the name of the State along all such roads and trails pursuant to revised Statute 2477 authorized by Congress in 1866.

The current Bureau of Land Management land status records show a reservation under 44LD513 (Department of the Interior land decisions) for most of the historic routes to and from the Wiseman and Chandalar area. As such, these trails would be reserved for public purposes in Federal ownership should patent be transferred.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Period and Type of Use

Some remarks by F. C. Schrader of the U. S. Geological Survey following his visit to the Chandalar and Koyukuk districts in 1899 aptly describe travel in the region:

> The Chandler (sic) and Koyukuk River regions form no exception to the rule of Alaskan travel. The almost invariable means is by boat or canoe along the waterways in summer, and overland by trail with the use of dog sleds (sic) in winter. The term "trail" as used in Alaska, refers more particularly to the passable condition of the country than to any foot-beaten path or well-worn line of travel. This is especially true of the Chandler (sic) and Koyukuk regions.

Most of the early stampeders and subsequent movement of supplies to the Koyukuk district came up the Koyukuk River by steamer to the head of navigation at Bergman and later Bettles. From there, people and goods transferred to horse-drawn scow or pole-boat and were taken upriver to Coldfoot or Nolan (Wiseman). Supplies often were stored until winter when they were taken upriver from Bettles by horse-drawn sled or dog team.

In the early days of the Koyukuk boom, some overland summer travel took place along the Dall Creek divide route from Fort Hamlin on the Yukon to Coldfoot. However, even by 1909, Maddren of the U. S. Geological Survey described this route as poorly marked and little used. Horses and a few cows were reported taken over this route.

There was also a trail used in the early stages of gold discovery that followed the Chandalar River up from Fort Yukon to the West Fork over the divide, across the South Fork of the Koyukuk headwaters, and down Slate Creek to Coldfoot. This was reported to be used in both summer

and winter. Maddren reported that winter and summer mail was carried to Coldfoot over this route from Fort Yukon prior to 1906. Because steamers reached Bettles during the summer, it is doubtful that much mail was carried up this route in summer.

In 1906, winter mail was carried north by dog team from Fort Gibbon on the Yukon to the upper Koyukuk following a route up the Tozitna River drainage, over the divide to Allakaket, and up the Koyukuk to Bettles, Coldfoot, and Nolan. Over the next several years, the Alaska Road Commission worked on the trail and finished it to winter trail standards in the winter of 1909-10. By 1917, the section between Bettles and Nolan had been upgraded to winter sled road standards. Horses as well as dogs were used to carry freight over this sled road.

Although steamers were taken up the Chandalar River, they could only ascend about 70 miles, or about 40 miles short of Caro and 75 miles from the mines. Thus, during the winter of 1909-10, work began on a trail from Beaver to Caro to better supply the Chandalar mining district. Over the next several years, a winter sled road was constructed which was also suitable for summer pack horses. By 1924, the sled road had been constructed to summer wagon road standards.

Frank Yasuda, a trader and prospector, and his partner Thomas Carter, upon hearing about the proposed ARC route, made plans for Yasuda to build a place where they thought the road would come out. Twenty-nine Mile Hill was used as a landmark. In 1910, Yasuda and his Eskimo wife, Nevelo, were living in Beaver along with James Mennano and his Eskimo wife and a third Eskimo family. During the years following the establishment of Beaver, Eskimos were employed by the Alaska Road Commission in building bridges and cabins.

Over the winters of 1911-12 and 1912-13, a winter trail was constructed from Chatanika to Beaver to link up with the Caro trail. This trail received little subsequent use or maintenance, but was brushed out and shelter cabins erected and restored again during the winter of 1923-24.

Although used by early mail carriers and miners, the Coldfoot-Caro trail did not receive any attention from the Alaska Road Commission until the winter of 1923-24 when the route was brushed out, tripods erected, and shelter cabins and river tramways erected. This improved trail was passable by dog teams in winter and by foot in summer.

Several routes and trails were established during and after 1906, between Coldfoot and the Chandalar diggings and to the mining areas from Caro. During the rush of 1906, over a hundred men were reported to have left the Koyukuk diggings to seek bonanzas on Big Creek, Little Squaw Creek, and Big Squaw Creek in the Chandalar Lake area. The route generally taken between the two districts left the old Fort Yukon-Coldfoot route near the Boulder Creek confluence with the South Fork of the Koyukuk, ran down Crooked Creek, up the Chandalar to Chandalar

Lake, and up Tobin Creek to the mining areas. Other routes were developed by the miners to and from the supply point at Caro. One route went up the Middle Fork of the Chandalar and down Grave Creek to the mines. Another followed Big Creek and over a divide into Little Squaw Creek.

The amount of use on the various trails generally corresponded to the amount of activity in the gold districts during a given year and to the physical development of a trail or sled road. The first significant rush utilizing the winter trails to the Koyukuk occurred in February and March of 1900 following the reports of major strikes on Myrtle and Slate Creeks. An estimated 200 people came up from Fort Yukon and from Fort Hamlin, overland to Coldfoot. Several hundred rushed to the Chandalar strikes in 1906. Although many came from the Koyukuk district and others came up the Chandalar by boat, others probably followed the old summer and winter trail up the Chandalar River from Fort Yukon.

Before break-up in 1908, approximately 200 prospectors again headed for the Koyukuk when news of the Nolan Creek strike came out. By this time, the trail up the Tozitna drainage was in use and many probably came north from Fort Gibbon. The Hammond River discoveries in 1911 again sparked trail activity to and from the Koyukuk.

However, in most years, mail delivery and the semi-annual migration of miners and prospectors constituted the mainstay of trail use. When the mail route was established on the Fort Gibbon-Koyukuk Trail in 1906, and Alaska Road Commission work on the trail began, that trail soon attracted additional travelers who may have otherwise taken a steamer. Similarly, the completion of the ARC trail and later sled road to Caro from Beaver soon became the primary route of overland travel to the Chandalar district and encouraged greater amounts of traffic than otherwise may have occurred with merely an unmaintained route.

Production and, hence, trail activity declined substantially after 1917 in the Koyukuk district. World War I and the attraction of many away from the gold fields in Alaska, the exhaustion of economically mined placers, and even prohibition are pointed to as reasons for this decline. Although a few persons continued to operate small placers, the Gold Rush Era was largely over in the Koyukuk by 1920.

The Chandalar district held more continued hope and less actual production than perhaps any other in Alaska. After the initial rush of 1906, fewer than 50 people ever worked the mines in a given year. The discovery of lode deposits prompted trail and sled road construction for the movement of necessary equipment, yet relatively little use was actually made of these developments. Ironically, it was not until the early 1920's, after the gold rushes, that the greatest gold production was reached. The boost in production in 1922 prompted the ARC to upgrade

the existing trails and sled roads in the area. However, little further use was made of them as gold production again sagged by the close of the 1920's and the air-age came to Alaska. The Caro Post Office, established in 1907, was discontinued in 1912.

Historic Trail Remnants

Many of the historic trails in and to the Koyukuk and Chandalar areas continued to be used after the Gold Rush Era by people employing dog teams, horsedrawn wagons and sleds, tractors, ATV's (all-terrain vehicles), and snow machines. Thus, trails over many of the old routes are still very evident.

The old route from Fort Gibbon to Bettles can be followed for most of its distance. This route has been traveled since the early mining days by vehicles and a track approximately 8 to 10 feet wide is visible, especially through forested or brushy areas. The segment between Allakaket and Bettles, realigned from the original trail, is heavily used by local residents on snow machines in the winter.

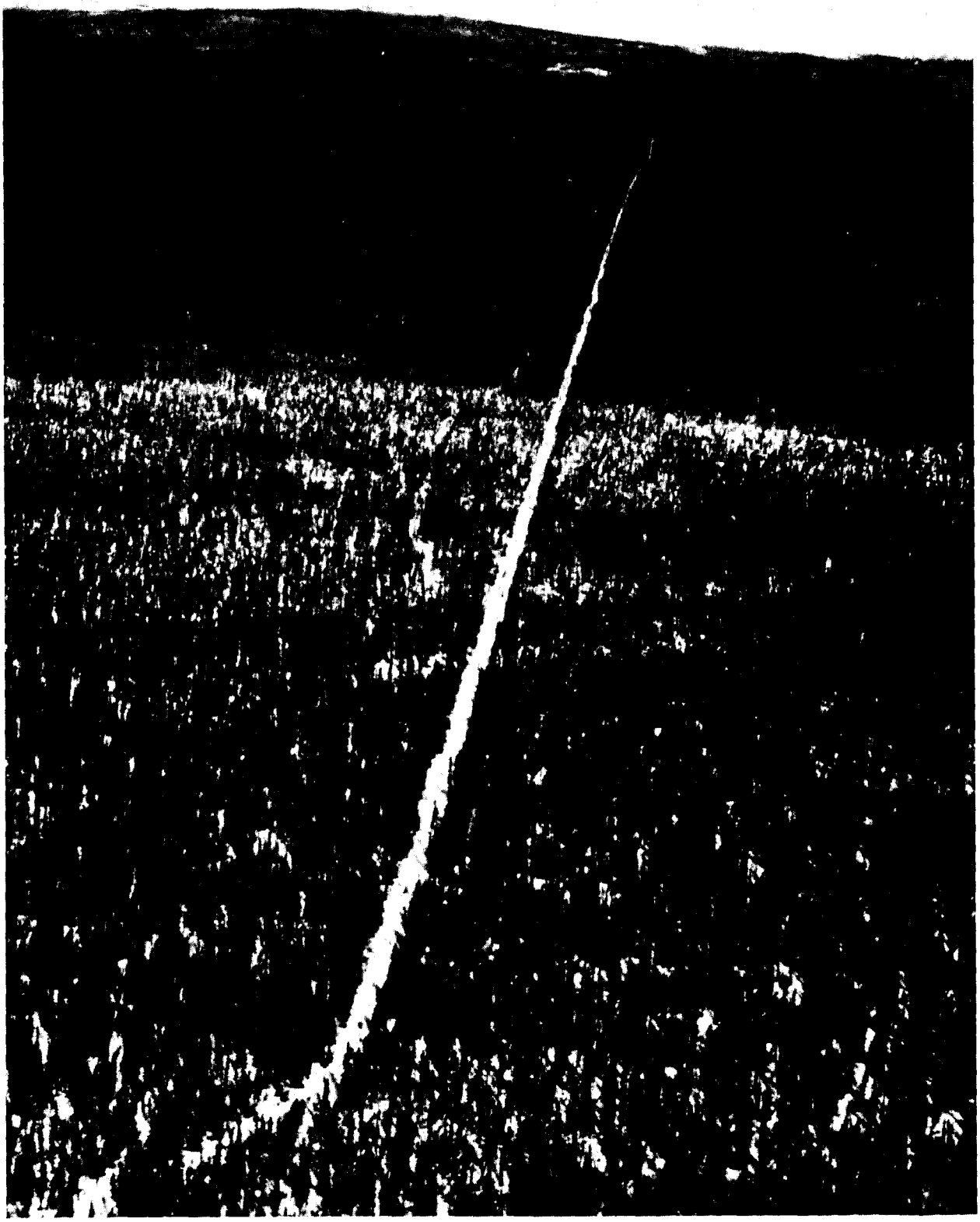
Several old and modern tractor trails exist between Bettles and Wiseman, one of which probably was superimposed on the old trail and the later sled road. From Coldfoot to Wiseman, a new gravel road was built along the Middle Fork to aid construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline.

Most of the old trails between Coldfoot and the Chandalar area and between Caro and the mines have been traveled in recent years by caterpillar tractors and other vehicles and cleared stretches through trees and brush are in evidence. As in the case of the Koyukuk trails, most of this travel has been in the winter months and low-growing brush and tundra vegetation forms the bed of most of these trails.

The wagon road which was developed from Beaver to Caro is still visible with little obstruction to winter travel. A wide roadbed of perhaps 20 to 30 feet exists along the entire route.

The Chatanika-Beaver trail is the least altered segment of the original Koyukuk-Chandalar routes but, at the same time, the least visible. Developments in the Fairbanks area and the construction of the Steese and Elliott Highways obliterated the original trail from Chatanika to about mile 22 of the Elliott Highway. From that point, the old route has been used in recent years by snowmachiners to the Big Bend area of Beaver Creek. Beyond, the old trail can be seen only faintly in a few places as it proceeds north along Beaver Creek, up over a divide, across Victoria Creek, over another divide, and across the Yukon Flats to Beaver.

Shelter cabins were erected at intervals along those trails and sled roads constructed by the Alaska Road Commission. Several of these cabins are still standing along the Beaver-Caro wagon road and along



Old route now used by "Cats" between Beaver and Caro.
(Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

the Chatanika-Beaver Trail. Cabins may also be present between Caro and Coldfoot and between Tanana (Fort Gibbon) and Allakaket.

Tools, implements, and equipment hauled over the old routes undoubtedly were lost or abandoned over the years. Such articles dating back to the late 1890's may still be present along the trails because of the relatively slow rate of oxidation and decomposition due to low precipitation and low mean annual temperatures.

Related Historic Sites

No sites associated with these routes have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the historical resources of the town of Wiseman have been studied by the Bureau of Land Management and a nomination to the National Register is contemplated. Wiseman currently has a population of between five and ten. Several cabins and buildings at the townsite may date back to the early gold mining days.

A pipeline construction camp is located on the site of Coldfoot and no historic buildings remain.

Although the population dwindled steadily, some persons remained in Bettles until the middle 1950's. However, with the development of a major airfield in 1945 and the new town of Bettles 5 miles upriver from the historic townsite, old Bettles became a ghost town. Many old structures and implements are still present.

Several old buildings dating back to the 1906 rush to the Chandalar area are also still standing at the deserted site of Caro on the Chandalar River.

It is not known if any evidence of historic Fort Gibbon or Fort Hamlin on the Yukon River exists. Similarly, evidence of the settlements of Bergman, Arctic City, and Peavey on the Koyukuk and several camps on the South Fork is uncertain.

Historical Significance

In relation to other gold mining areas of Alaska and the Yukon, such as the Klondike, Nome, Fairbanks, and Iditarod, the Koyukuk and Chandalar districts were not major gold producers, nor did they attract as many people as the other areas. Trail use to the Koyukuk and Chandalar areas was correspondingly light. Only perhaps 200 persons utilized the Koyukuk trails in a peak year. The use of steamers on the Koyukuk also contributed to the light use of overland routes.

Total placer gold production by the Koyukuk district by 1970 amounted to just over 300,000 ounces or slightly more than $7 million. Chandalar production amounted to only 29,760 ounces or $780,000. Some additional gold in the form of lode deposits was produced in the Chandalar district.

Historic mining town of Caro. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

The Koyukuk production represents approximately 2.3 percent of the placer production in the Yukon region of Alaska and about 1.4 percent of the total Alaskan production. Combined with the Chandalar, Koyukuk production amounted to 2.5 percent of the Yukon region and 1.6 percent of the Alaskan totals.

However, the Koyukuk was by far the most important district north of the Arctic Circle. The Koyukuk and Chandalar districts presented perhaps the greatest challenges and hardships for gold seekers in Alaska and the Yukon. The remoteness and severe environment were major obstacles to the prospecting and working of claims. The cost of equipment and supplies in the Koyukuk and Chandalar districts was among the highest in Alaska, due to the extremely long distances involved and the several breaks in the route. It is estimated that costs involved in mining reduced the profits from gold produced by 50 percent.

The trails leading to these districts were among the most northerly continuous trail connections in Alaska, stretching 200 air miles north of Fairbanks and 80 air miles north of the Arctic Circle (approximately 67° N. latitude). The mail carriers, miners, and others who mushed these lonely trails, with temperatures commonly 40 to 60 degrees below zero, demonstrated a rare determination and ability to survive incredible hardships.

PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE TRAIL USES

Present Trail Condition

None of the historic route segments are currently being publicly maintained as trails. Yet, many of the various segments continue to be used and are discernable and passable in winter over large sections. Summer vehicular use and even pedestrian use is limited to only a few short discontinuous segments due to the presence of low brush, tussocks, muskeg and marshy areas, stream crossings, and other obstacles.

The recently constructed gravel road from the Yukon River to Alaska's North Slope is superimposed or closely parallels the old Dall River route to Coldfoot and the sled road from Coldfoot to Wiseman.

Scenic and Recreational Qualities

Most of the route segments from the Yukon River to the base of the Brooks Range near Coldfoot and Caro possess moderate scenic values. In comparison to other areas of Alaska, the low mountains, ridges, and flats of the Yukon River interior are not generally thought of as having special beauty or distinctive visual features.

The Brooks Range, on the other hand, possesses exceptional scenic values and has received considerable acclaim for its stark, rugged beauty. Broad, low-lying forested valleys dramatically contrast with the sweeping

alpine tundra and barren rock outcroppings on steeply pitched adjacent slopes and towering peaks. The numerous clear-water rivers and streams contrast sharply with the milky, glacial rivers so common in other major mountain ranges in Alaska.

The historic route between Coldfoot and Caro and between Coldfoot and Chandalar Lake is highly scenic, especially in the Slate Creek divide area. However, much of this route is located along the rivers within very broad valleys on the southern flank of the Brooks Range. Many other areas of the Brooks Range are of greater scenic value, including the more modern local mining trails located north of the Coldfoot-Caro route in the Big Lake vicinity. In this area and in others in the Brooks Range, valleys are narrower, peaks are higher, and a greater sensation of being in the mountains exists.

Another segment of high scenic value exists along the old Chatanika-Beaver Trail between the Elliott Highway and the southern edge of the Yukon Flats. The old trail through the Beaver and Victoria Creek areas traverses a variety of vegetative zones from large white spruce forests along the extremely clear rivers to sweeping alpine tundra across the drainage divides. The exposed limestone outcroppings along the peaks and ridges of the White Mountains form a striking scenic backdrop along most of this trail section.

Over most of the various routes, a wilderness environment exists. Opportunities for recreating and viewing plants and animals in a natural setting, largely undisturbed by man, are excellent.

Obstacles to recreation are significant over these routes. Except for the Chatanika-Beaver segment, the routes are presently accessible only by commercial and charter air service. Summer overland travel along most of the routes, except in a few short alpine areas, is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Thickets, windfalls, tussocks, lakes, muskegs, marshes, mosquitoes, and other obstacles continually impede travel. Winter offers far superior travel conditions although the severe cold, deep snow, remoteness, and long distances limit recreational use.

The use of the historic trails by modern day tracked vehicles and all-terrain vehicles has in some cases substantially changed the character of the immediate trail area. The enlarged trail width, the cutting, knocking down, or scraping of vegetation, "cat" tracks, and other signs of the mechanized age detract in places from the historical and primitive recreational values.

Similarly, the construction of the gravel pipeline road from the Yukon River to the North Slope has diminished wilderness and historic values. The road, if opened to the public, would improve access to some of the trail areas.

Recreational Uses

The only significant recreational use presently occurring on any of the route segments is between the Elliott Highway at approximately mile 22 and the Big Bend area of Beaver Creek. A trail follows the old route approximately 20 miles down Wickersham Creek to a BLM public use cabin on Beaver Creek. From the cabin area, the trail continues down Beaver Creek approximately 5 miles to the Big Bend area of Beaver Creek. This trail receives significant use by snowmachiners, cross-country skiers, and dog mushers, especially in the late winter and early spring months. Open water caused by springs in the Big Bend area provides winter grayling fishing.

A 22-mile summer trail generally paralleling the winter trail has been constructed by BLM on a nearby ridge above the Wickersham Creek valley. This trail receives some use by hikers during summer months, although the trail is, as yet, in only fair condition.

Some nontrail-oriented recreational use is probably also occurring. Fly-in fishing and hunting are widespread over the region and some light use probably takes place in the vicinity of the various routes.

With the exception of the trails into Beaver Creek from the Elliott Highway, recreational trail-oriented use is not anticipated to increase significantly over the next several years.

Nonrecreational Uses

Various segments of the historic routes are currently used as basic transportation arteries. The old Dall Creek route and the sled road from Coldfoot to Wiseman have been overlain or closely paralleled by a gravel highway. This road was used in construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline and may be opened to the public.

The trail segment from Allakaket to Bettles is heavily used in the winter months by snowmachiners. In addition to the travel from Allakaket to the store and other services in Bettles and to the visiting of friends and relatives, the trail provides access for subsistence hunting, trapping, and wood-cutting. A short segment of the trail south from Allakaket towards Tanana (Fort Gibbon) is also used in winter subsistence activities, primarily by snowmachines and to a lesser extent by dog teams.

Snowmachines and a few dog teams also utilize the historic route north from Tanana for hunting, trapping, and wood-cutting activities. A military radar installation is located several miles north of Tanana and may utilize portions of the historic route for local access and the functions of the site.

The villagers of Beaver also depend heavily on subsistence activities, and the segments of the Beaver-Caro wagon road and the Chatanika-Beaver trail are traveled for many miles north and south of the village in winter hunting, trapping, and wood-cutting activities. This use is primarily by snowmachine, although a few dog teams may still be used. Some summer use of the Beaver-Caro wagon road by ATV or on foot may be occurring north of Beaver, although brush, marshy ground, and stream crossings impede most travel for more than a few miles.

Mining continues on a small scale in the Wiseman and Chandalar Lake areas. Portions of the historic routes are occasionally traversed by cats and other heavy equipment and ATV's used in mining operations and in supplying field camps.

Future selections of public domain lands by Natives and the State could result in additional nonrecreational use of lands along the route. Resource development by the State and Native corporations is expected.

The proposed extensions of the transportation system by the State of Alaska as of July 1973 include two routes which involve segments of the historic routes. A road which would pass through Bettles and Allakaket is proposed from the existing pipeline road to Kobuk. This route would cross and, at other places pass near, the old route between Allakaket and Bettles. Another road would connect Arctic Village with the pipeline road. This road would follow the old Coldfoot-Caro route from the pipeline road to the Middle Fork of the Chandalar, then up that river and over a divide into the East Fork of the Chandalar drainage.

A preliminary, conceptual analysis of transportation and utility systems in Alaska, released by the Bureau of Land Management in October 1974, recommends a number of corridors be reserved for such systems. Several of these involve the historic routes. A corridor for a number of transportation and utility modes is proposed from the pipeline road through Bettles and Allakaket to Kotzebue and the Seward Peninsula. A railroad corridor is proposed which would generally follow the Fort Gibbon-Koyukuk Trail from Allakaket to Tanana. A corridor for an oil pipeline and gas pipeline is recommended from the pipeline road up the Yukon River, across the historic Beaver-Caro sled road in the Beaver area, and up the Porcupine River. An alternative route for a highway, gas pipeline, and oil pipeline is recommended which would follow the Middle Fork of the Chandalar from its headwaters then down the Chandalar past Caro to Fort Yukon.

Tramway Bar, where gold was first discovered in the Koyukuk area in 1893. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Qualification for National Scenic Trail Designation

The criteria used in evaluating the Koyukuk-Chandalar routes were as follows:

Criterion: Because of their special characteristics, National Scenic Trails should be nationally significant and be capable of attracting visitors from throughout the United States.

Finding: The overland trails and routes to the Koyukuk and Chandalar gold districts were traveled very lightly, even during boom years. These districts, although the most important north of the Arctic Circle, were quite modest in terms of numbers of stampeders, miners, and amount of production in comparison to other gold districts in Alaska. These trails and routes could not be considered to have national historical significance, and, in all likelihood, would not attract visitors from throughout the United States because of their remoteness, general lack of major scenic and historical attraction, and arduous trail conditions, both winter and summer.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails are designated for hiking and other compatible uses. The National Trails System Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment on these trails, except in certain circumstances.

Finding: Historic travel along the route took the path of least resistance rather than a particularly scenic route. In addition, most of the route segments were used primarily in winter months when snow and ice covered obstacles, open water, and rough terrain. Most of the historic Koyukuk and Chandalar routes have low potential for summer hiking use. Winter nonmechanized recreational use such as cross-country skiing and dog mushing is presently only occurring over one 20-mile segment and potential for greater use appears low over remaining segments.

Snowmachines are presently used as basic transportation and in subsistence activities along segments of the historic routes near Tanana, Allakaket, Bettles (Evansville), and Beaver. Heavy equipment and ATV's have utilized portions of the route in connection with mining and mineral survey activities.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails of historical importance should adhere as accurately as possible to their principal historic routes.

Finding: The Dall Creek route and the historic sled road from Coldfoot to Nolan (Wiseman) have been overlain or closely paralleled by a gravel highway. Except in this area, the historic routes are

generally undeveloped and a trail could be constructed which would adhere closely to the historic routes.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be provided with adequate public access through connecting local or regional trails. Access should be located at reasonable intervals to provide for trips of various lengths.

Finding: Surface transportation currently exists only to the Chatanika-Beaver Trail segment at mile 22 of the Elliott Highway. If and when the pipeline road is opened to the public, surface access would be available to the segment from Bettles to Wiseman and to the Coldfoot-Caro route at Coldfoot. Air access exists at scattered airfields and bush strips. A connecting trail system and access to points along the routes would be extremely costly, difficult, and impractical to construct.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be primarily land based.

Finding: The routes to the Koyukuk and Chandalar districts were primarily land based.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be of sufficient length to encompass and provide appropriate access to the resources which are a basis for the trails designation.

Finding: The historic trail from Fort Gibbon to Coldfoot and Nolan (Wiseman) was 273 miles long. The route from Chatanika through Beaver to Caro was 195 miles in length. The segment from Caro to Coldfoot was 85 miles long. Other segments totaled hundreds of additional miles for an overall total of 1,273 miles.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be continuous except where no practicable or feasible interconnection exists.

Finding: A continuous trail following the historic route(s) could be constructed.

Conclusions

The various trails and routes leading to and through the Koyukuk and Chandalar gold strikes lack major historical, scenic, or recreational importance. They are not capable of attracting visitors from throughout the United States, and do not have good potential for hiking or other recreational uses. For this reason, designation as National Scenic or National Historic Trails is not warranted.

Recommendations

It is recommended that no further consideration be given to the Koyukuk-Chandalar routes as potential National Scenic or National Historic

Trails. As the various Federal and State agencies develop recreational plans for those areas adjacent to the new pipeline road, consideration should be given to developing trails from the road along short segments of the historic routes in those areas of high scenic values such as the Coldfoot and Wiseman areas.

Several historic townsites exist along the routes, which contain buildings and other remnants dating back to the Gold Rush Era. Because of the likelihood for loss of these historic remains, it is recommended that the land managing agencies work with private landowners in developing a plan for historic preservation and possible inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places for the townsites of Wiseman (Nolan), old Bettles, and Caro.

Historic sites along the Yukon and Koyukuk Rivers need to be surveyed for evidence of historic resources. Potential historic significance exists at Fort Gibbon and Fort Hamlin on the Yukon River; Bergman, Arctic City, and Peavey on the Koyukuk River; and several camps along the South Fork Koyukuk River.

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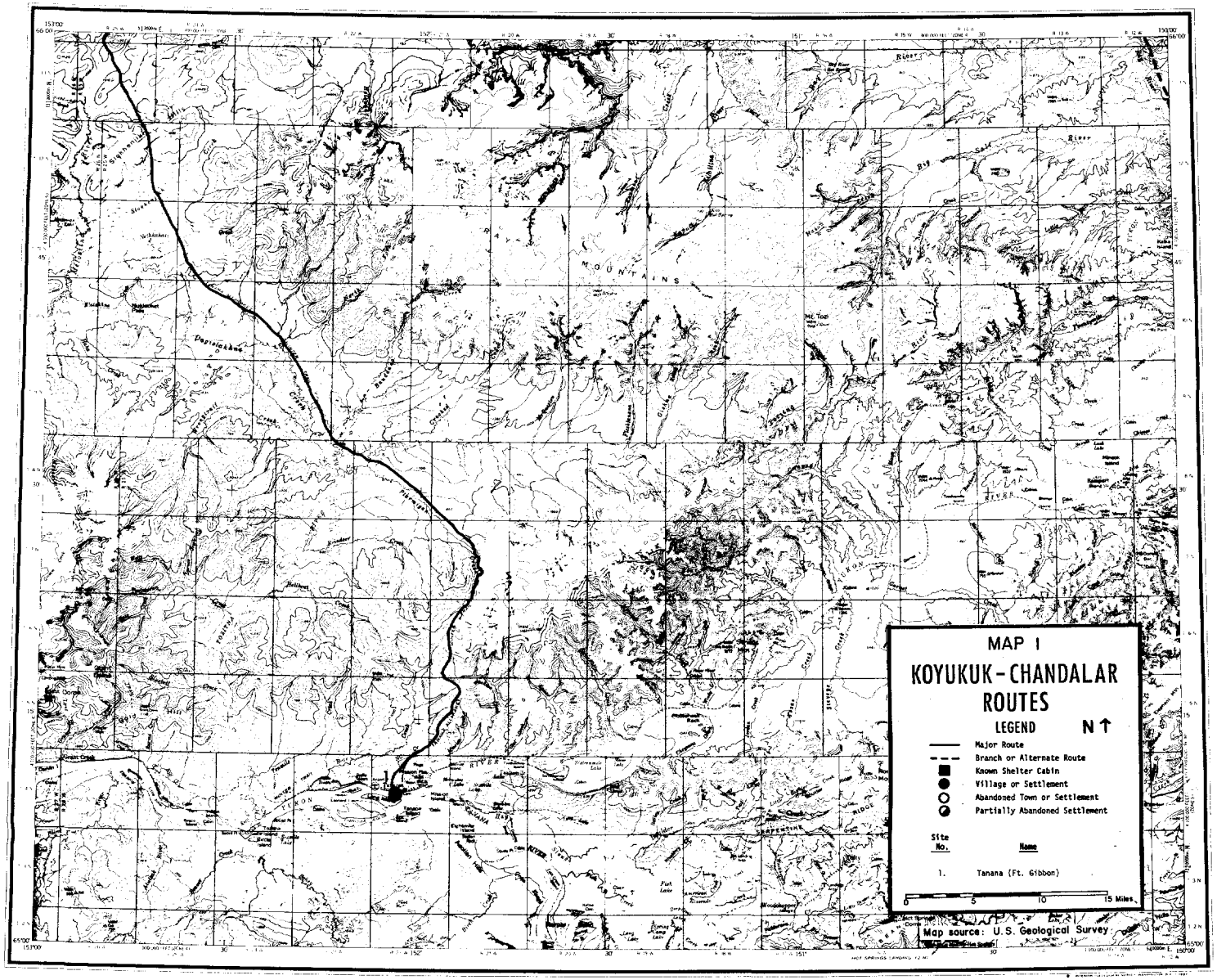
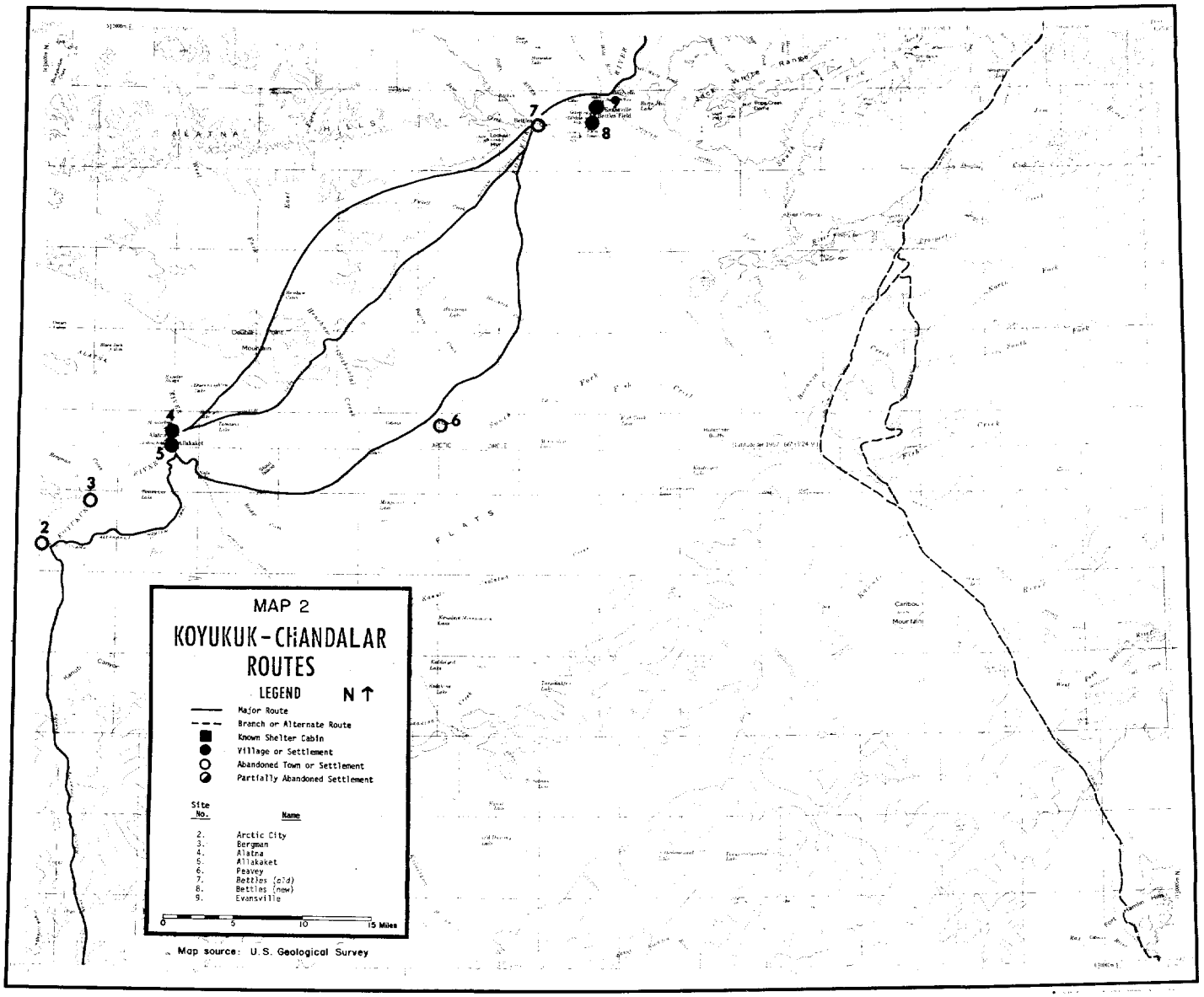
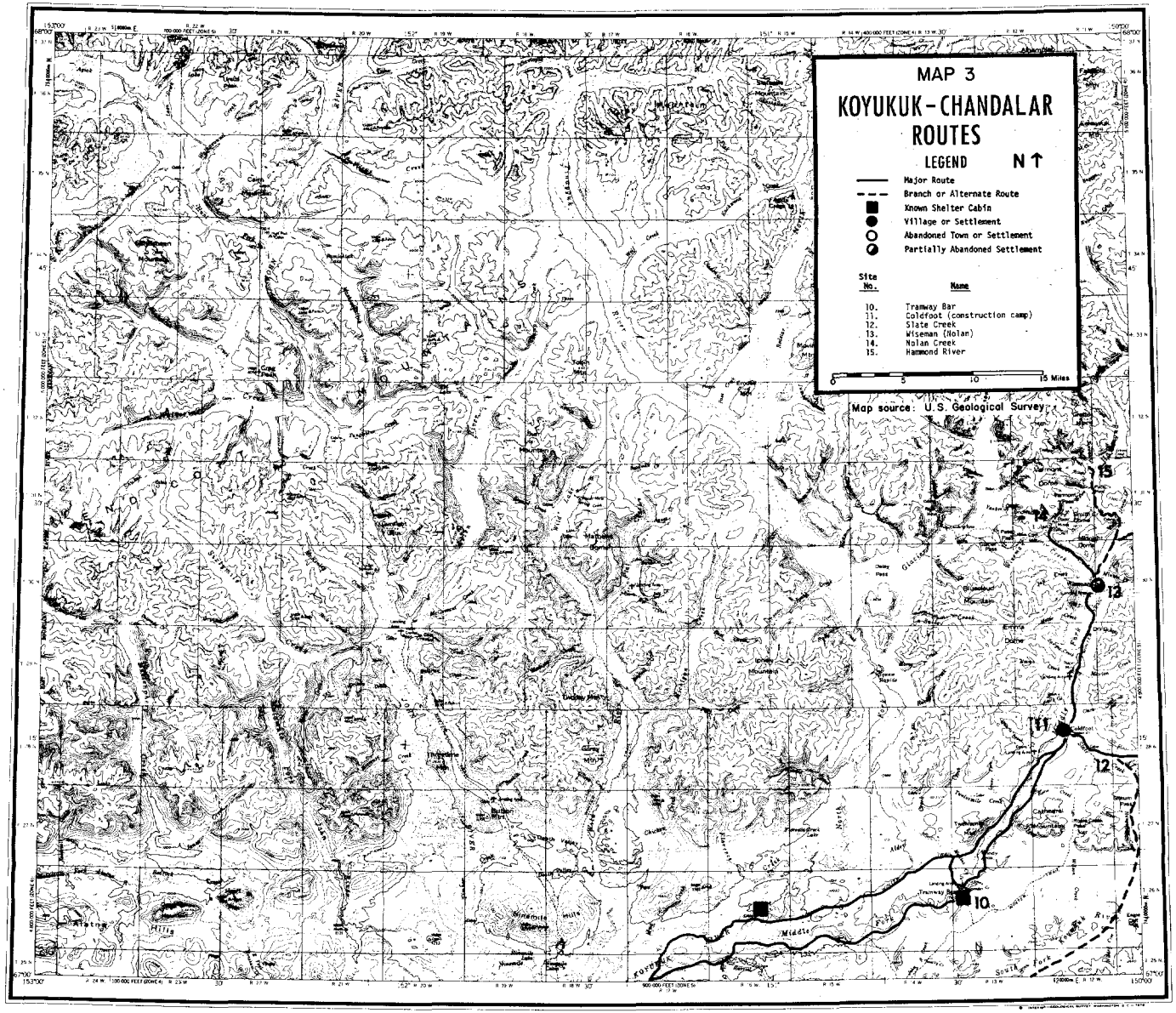
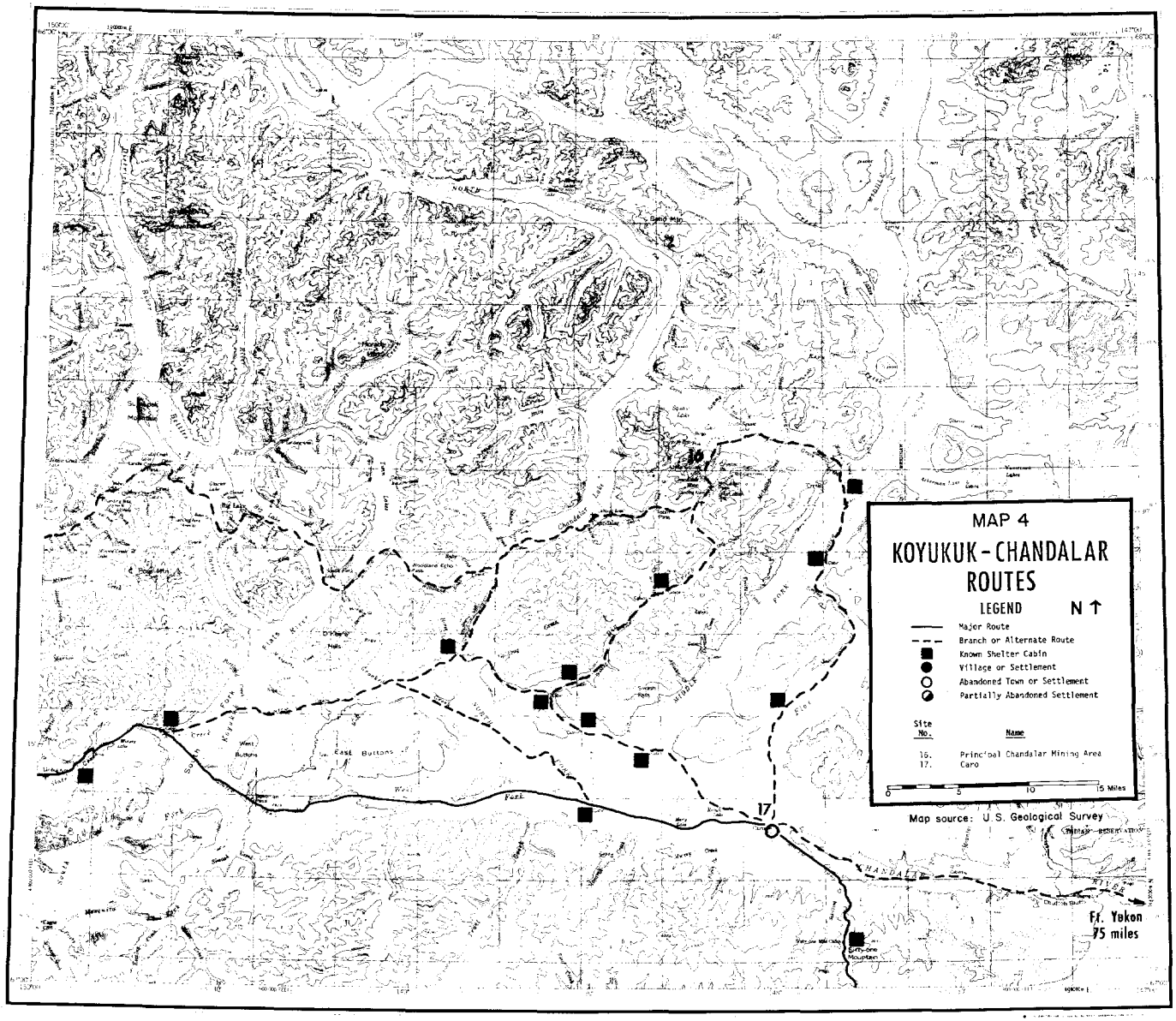
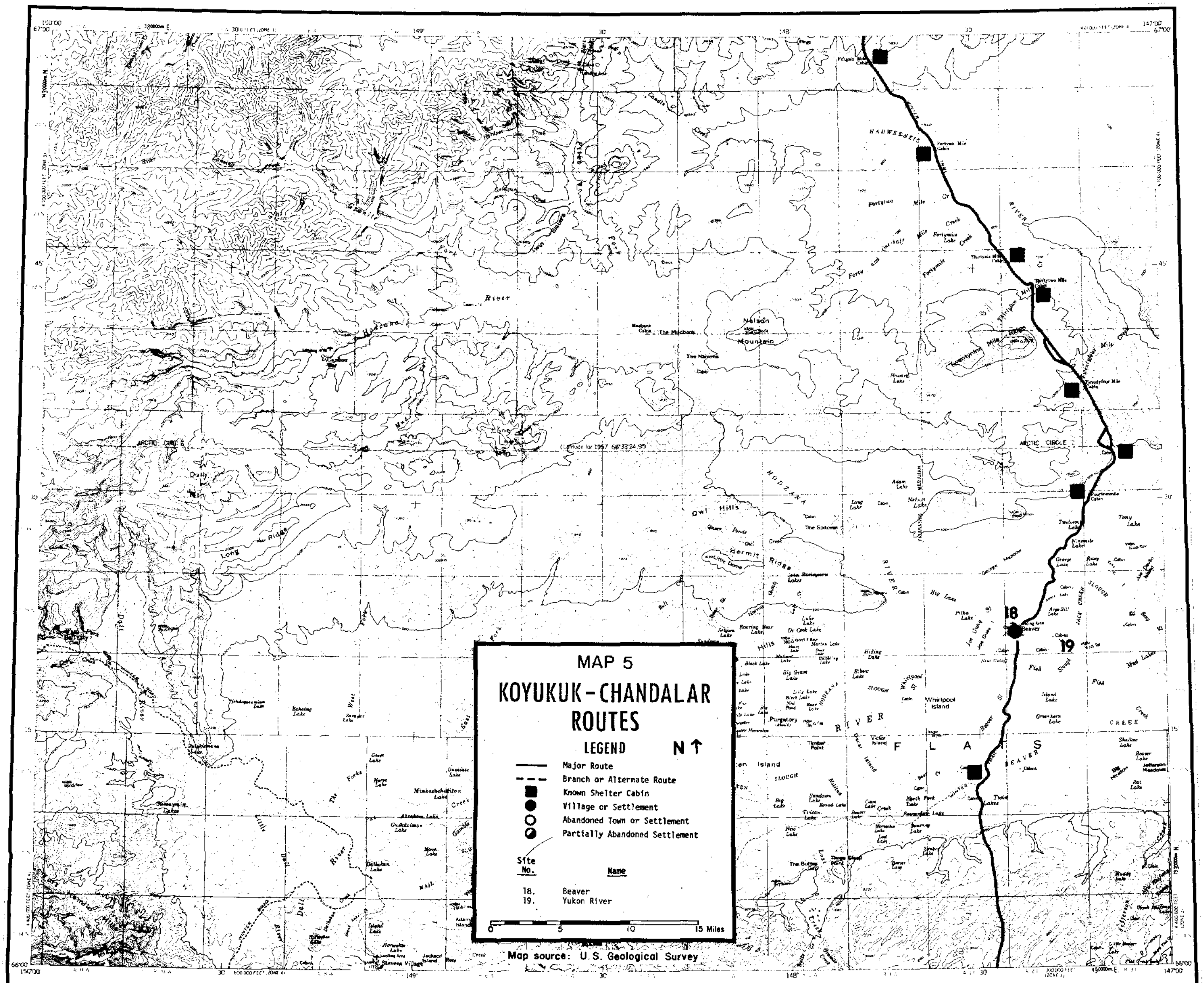
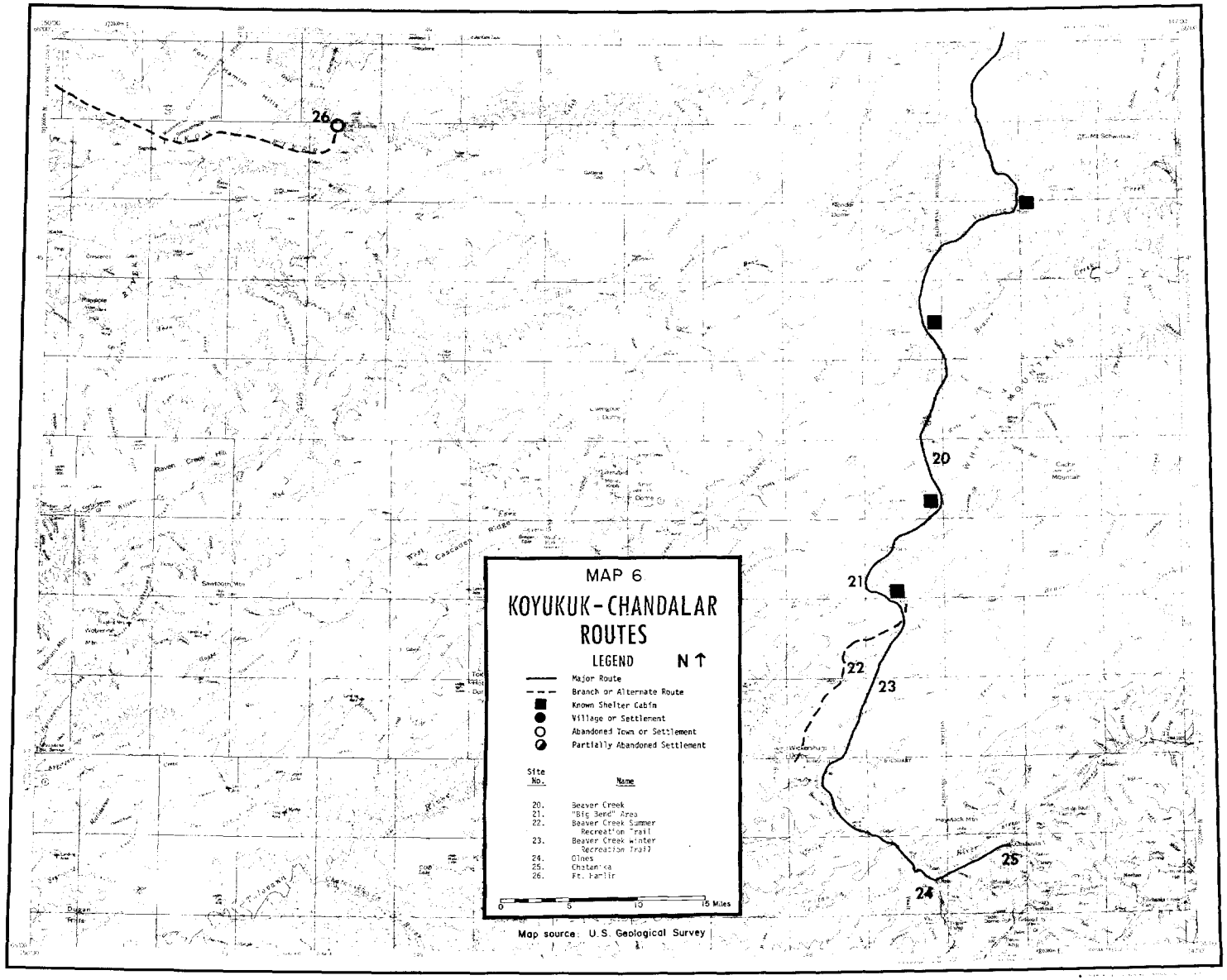

MAP 1
KOYUKUK - CHANDALAR ROUTES
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Known Shelter Cabin
Village or Settlement
Abandoned Town or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Settlement
Site No.
Name
1. Tanana (Ft. Gibbon)
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey


MAP 2
KOYUKUK-CHANDALAR ROUTES
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Known Shelter Cabin
Village or Settlement
Abandoned Town or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Settlement
Site No.
Name
2. Arctic City
3. Bergman
4. Alatna
5. Allakaket
6. Peavey
7. Bettles (old)
8. Bettles (new)
9. Evansville
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey


MAP 3
KOYUKUK - CHANDALAR ROUTES
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Known Shelter Cabin
Village or Settlement
Abandoned Town or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Settlement
Site No.
Name
10. Tramway Bar
11. Coldfoot (construction camp)
12. Slate Creek
13. Wiseman (Nolan)
14. Nolan Creek
15. Hammond River
0
5
10
15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
10
11
12
13
14
15
Middle Fork
South Fork

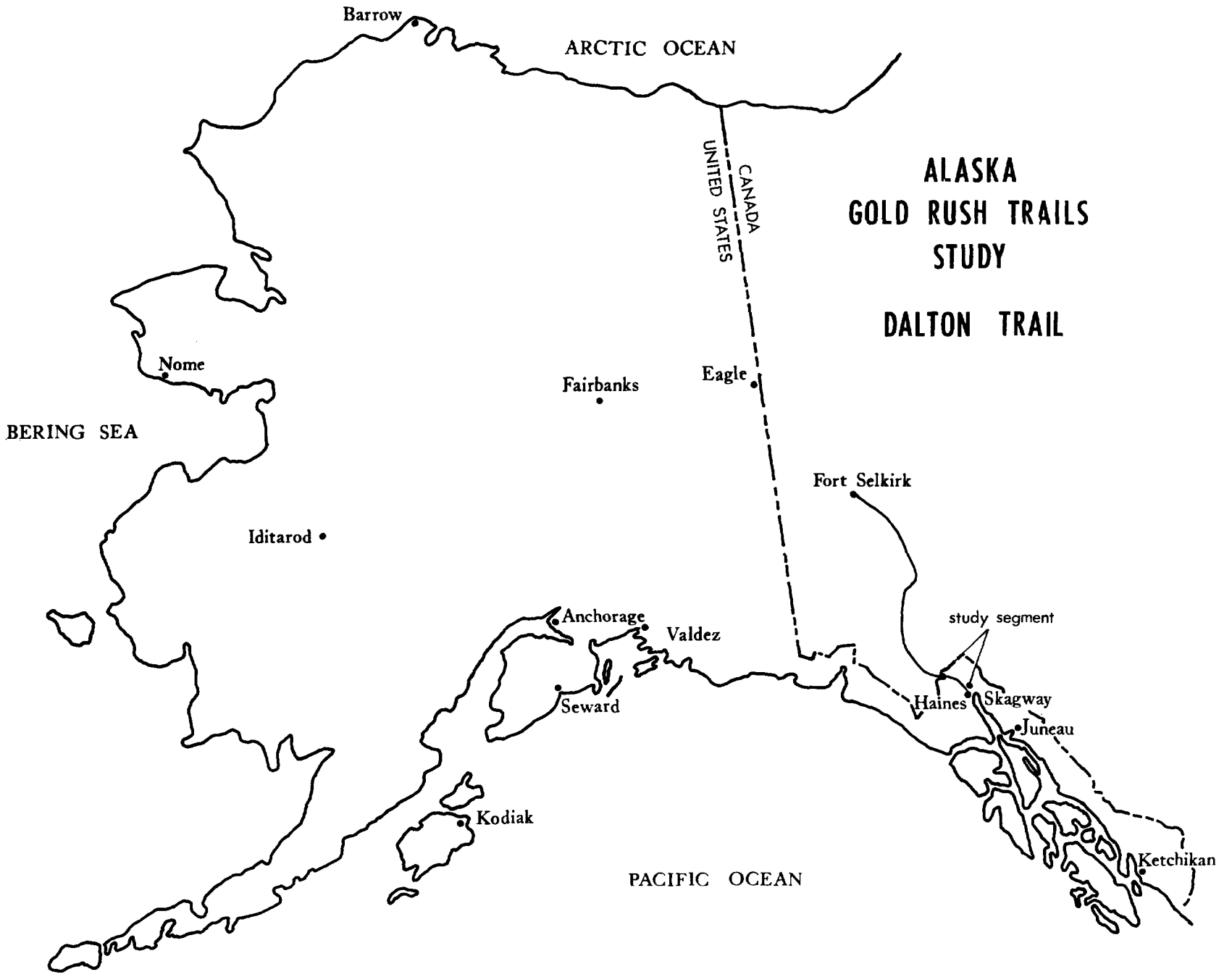

MAP 4
KOYUKUK - CHANDALAR ROUTES
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Known Shelter Cabin
Village or Settlement
Abandoned Town or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Settlement
Site No.
Name
16. Principal Chandalar Mining Area
17. Caro
0
5
10
15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
16
17
Ft. Yukon
75 miles


MAP 5
KOYUKUK-CHANDALAR ROUTES
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Known Shelter Cabin
Village or Settlement
Abandoned Town or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Settlement
Site No.
Name
18. Beaver
19. Yukon River
0
5
10
15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
Nelson Mountain
Owl Hills
Hermit Ridge
Long Ridge
ARCTIC CIRCLE
Whirlpool Island
Beaver
18
19


MAP 6
KOYUKUK - CHANDALAR ROUTES
LEGEND
N
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route
Known Shelter Cabin
Village or Settlement
Abandoned Town or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Settlement
Site No.
Name
20. Beaver Creek
21. "Big Bend" Area
22. Beaver Creek Summer Recreation Trail
23. Beaver Creek Winter Recreation Trail
24. Olnes
25. Chatanika
26. Ft. Hamlin
0
5
10
15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
20
21
22
23
24
25
26

Dalton Trail

Pyramid Harbor to the Canadian Border


Barrow
ARCTIC OCEAN
CANADA
UNITED STATES
ALASKA
GOLD RUSH TRAILS
STUDY
DALTON TRAIL
Nome
Fairbanks
Eagle
BERING SEA
Fort Selkirk
Iditarod
Anchorage
Valdez
study segment
Seward
Haines
Skagway
Juneau
Kodiak
Ketchikan
PACIFIC OCEAN

DALTON TRAIL (Pyramid Harbor to the Canadian Border)

BACKGROUND

For hundreds of years, the Chilkat Indians along the Chilkat River in southeast Alaska used a route through the rugged Coastal Mountains to trade with the so-called Stick Indians in the interior. The Chilkat people guarded this route jealously to prevent others from interfering with their trade monopoly with the Sticks.

In the late 1800's, increasing numbers of prospectors, explorers, missionaries, and others moved up the coast from Seattle, British Columbia, and other areas, and the secret trail of the Chilkats was soon discovered. In 1889, Edmund Bean is reported to have learned of the route up the Chilkat and Klehini Rivers into the interior. The year before, John Muir and a missionary named S. Hall Young had sailed into Chilkat Inlet and talked with Chilkat Indian leaders from the village of Klukwan. In 1881, Young returned with Sheldon Jackson and together they established Chilkat Mission, soon renamed Haines Mission, near the mouth of the Chilkat River.

Frank Leslie of Leslie Magazine organized a party in 1890 which explored the area up the Chilkat River and over the divide into the interior. One of the young scouts hired for this expedition was John "Jack" Dalton. The following year, Dalton and E. J. Glave explored the route, which became the Dalton Trail, to the Indian village on the Tatshenshini River, a tributary of the Alsek. Pack horses were taken into the interior on this trip for the first time.

Gold was discovered in the Klondike in the fall of 1896. Word reached outside in the late spring of 1897 and the gold rush was on. Jack Dalton, by this time, was a seasoned businessman in the upper Lynn Canal area and immediately set in motion plans to develop a toll trail to the gold fields. Although the routes over Chilkoot Pass and White Pass were shorter, they were also much steeper and more tortuous than the old Chilkat Trail. In July of 1897, Dalton hired a professional surveyor to map and survey his new personal trail to the Klondike following the historic Chilkat route.

By the early summer of 1897, a good pack horse trail had been constructed from Pyramid Harbor near the mouth of the Chilkat River to the summit of the Coastal Mountains in Canada. From there, the trail continued through more or less open country to Rink Rapid on the Yukon.

During that same summer, gold was discovered near the Dalton Trail on Porcupine Creek, 36 miles from Haines Mission. A small rush occurred over the next year. Gold mining in the Porcupine area continued for many years and played an important role in the local economy into the early 1900's.

The Alaskan and Yukon gold rushes created a need for law enforcement. Many posts were established in the early 1900's, the largest being Fort William H. Seward. This fort was established by the Army in 1903-04 and was located just outside of Haines Mission.

LOCATION AND REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

General Alignment

The overall general alignment of the Dalton Trail in Alaska and British Columbia is shown on the following maps. It connected the northern portion of southeastern Alaska with the Yukon.

From its origin at Pryamid Harbor, it crossed about 5 miles of mud beach exposed at low tide, then proceeded along the west side of the Chilkat River, moved away from the river opposite Klukwan, then up the south side of the Klehini River to the vicinity of Boulder Creek. Here the trail crossed the Klehini and continued along the north side to the Canadian border.

From the border, the trail zigzagged to the first summit, a little over 3,300 feet, and down the Tatshenshini River to Dalton Post. From there, the trail went around Dezadeash Lake to Champagne, and then to Hutshi. From Hutshi, the main trail went down the Nordenskiold River to Carmacks and Rink Rapid on the Yukon. An extension of this route continued north to Fort Selkirk. A branch trail went west out of Hutshi to Aishihik Lake and then north across the upper Nisling River drainage to Fort Selkirk at the Pelly River and Yukon confluence.

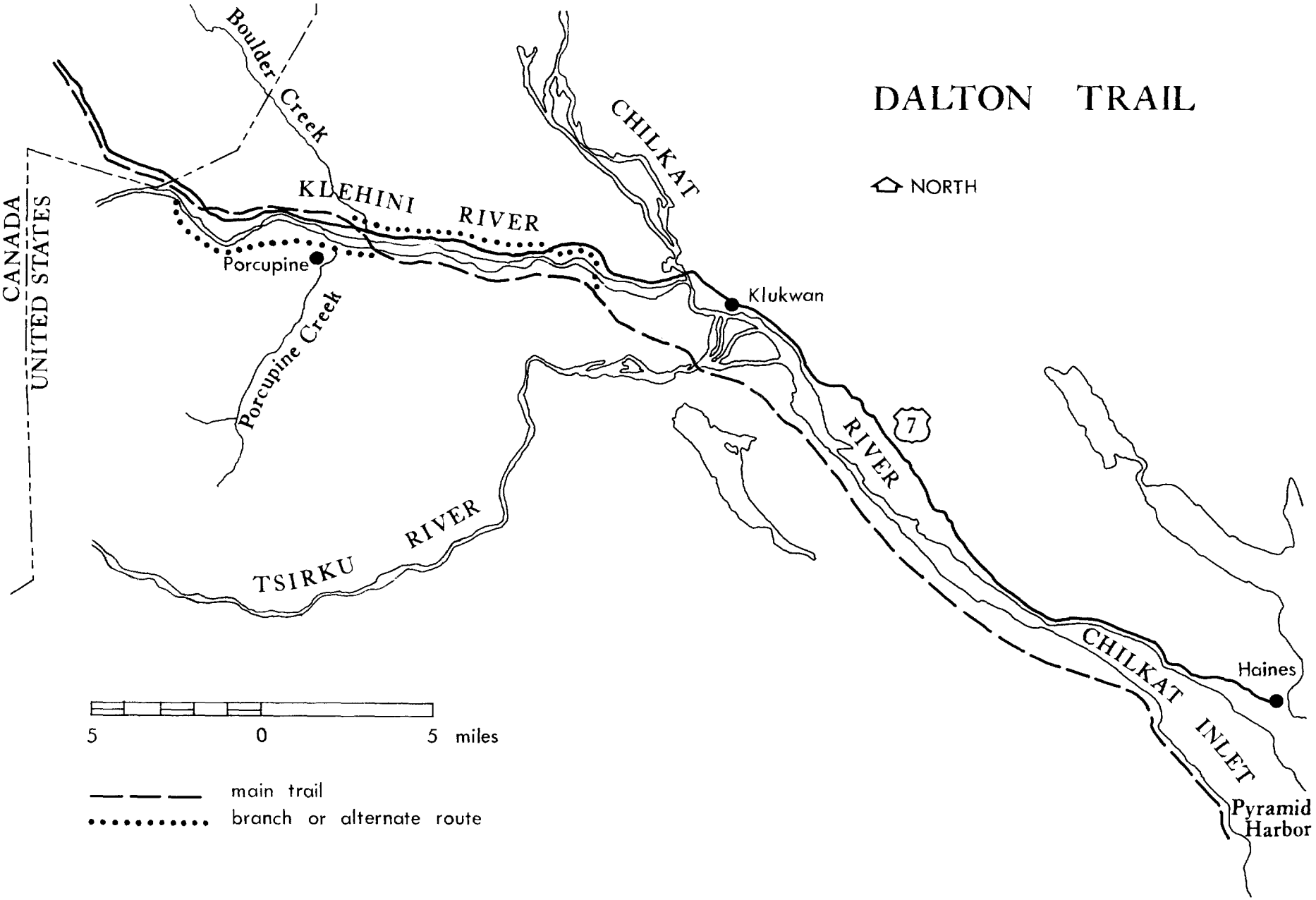
Because the Klehini River is a braided, glacier-fed river, channel changes were frequent and water depths varied greatly over the course of a season. Consequently, river crossing points varied, sometimes ranging from just above Klukwan to near the Canadian border.

Length

The segment in the United States was about 55 miles long. From Pyramid Harbor to Dalton Post in the Yukon was 126 miles. The length of the Dalton Trail from Pyramid Harbor to Rink Rapid on the Yukon was about 305 miles. The trail continued an additional 45 miles to Fort Selkirk. Dawson is located approximately 200 river miles downstream from Fort Selkirk. The major constructed portion of the trail extended approximately 65 miles to timberline.

Regional Climate, Topography, Vegetation, and Wildlife

The Dalton Trail area in the United States lies in a maritime climatic zone characterized by cool summers, moderate winters, and heavy pre-


DALTON TRAIL
NORTH
CANADA
UNITED STATES
Boulder Creek
KLEHINI RIVER
CHILKAT
Porcupine
Porcupine Creek
Klukwan
7
RIVER
TSIRKU RIVER
CHILKAT INLET
Haines
Pyramid Harbor
5 0 5 miles
main trail
branch or alternate route

cipitation. Summer highs rarely exceed 80°F and winter lows reach -20°F. Precipitation averages around 60 inches a year with up to 100 inches of snow. A more continental climate is encountered as one proceeds up river to the Canadian border. Less precipitation, warmer summer temperatures, and colder winter temperatures occur further from the sea coast.

The trail followed the glacial valleys of the Klehini and Chilkat Rivers in the United States. Over virtually their entire breadth, the flat valley floors show evidence of past stream channels. The Chilkat valley averages 2 miles across, while the Klehini valley is only about one-half mile wide. The elevation of the Klehini at the border is 812 feet.

Because of shifting stream channels, the historic route was often pressed between the valley floor and the steep slopes of the adjacent hills and mountains. Nearby peaks rise to over 5,000 feet in elevation. The many swift streams carrying the runoff of melting glaciers from these peaks have cut deep ravines and canyons which intersect the Chilkat and Klehini valleys.

A dense western hemlock-Sitka spruce forest covers the river valleys up to an elevation of around 2,500 feet. Black cottonwood and red cedar are also common in the area. In most places, an almost impenetrable undergrowth of alder, devil's club, willows, berries, and ferns exists.

Large game animals in the area include black bear, brown/grizzly bear, moose, mountain goats, wolves, and wolverine. Other wildlife includes many species of furbearers, waterfowl, and other birds. Trumpeter swan nesting has been recorded in the Chilkat valley. This is the southernmost known nesting of these swans in Alaska. Of special significance is the concentration of bald eagles which occurs along the lower Chilkat beginning in October and persisting well into December. This is reported to be the greatest concentration in the world. In 1970, over 3,500 were counted in a 2-mile stretch--one cottonwood tree was reported to have 56 perching birds. The streams in the area have excellent runs of several species of salmon which attract the eagles.

On the Canadian side, near the border, a different type of environment exists. Sweeping alpine tundra replaces the forest about 15 miles upstream, beyond the border. For over 50 miles, this high open country continues until dropping down into the rolling hills and plateaus of the Yukon interior. A severe continental climate replaces the maritime coastal climate of the Chilkat valley and a sparser, more open spruce-birch forest cover prevails.

Land Uses and Access

About 1,500 people live in the Chilkat valley with most living in and around the City of Haines. Others live along the Haines Highway or Haines Cutoff which runs from the ferry terminal 3 miles east of Haines to the Canadian border and north to the Alcan Highway in the Yukon Territory.

Although most of the land is in a more or less natural state, timber is the leading industry of the area and many areas in the Chilkat valley show evidence of past and present timber harvesting. Fishing and tourism are also important. The development of iron ore deposits along the Chilkat River near the village of Klukwan has been proposed.

In addition to the highway which parallels the Chilkat and Klehini Rivers along their east and north banks respectively, access by air and water is also available. Haines is served daily by commercial air service from Juneau and by passenger and auto ferry service from Prince Rupert, British Columbia; Skagway, Alaska; and Seattle, Washington. Access by motorboat and canoe to various sections of the trail route is also possible along the Chilkat and Klehini Rivers.

Over 100 Indians continue to live in the historic village of Klukwan. Although tied to a dollar economy by Haines and the highway, some subsistence hunting, fishing, and trapping activities continue to take place.

General Land Ownership

Most of the land in the Chilkat and Klehini valleys is owned by the State of Alaska. The village of Klukwan recently selected lands surrounding the village under the terms of Public Law 94-204 passed January 2, 1976. Several parcels of private property exist along the Dalton Trail route, and mining claims may still be active in the Porcupine area.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Period and Type of Use

Prior to construction of the Dalton Trail in the early summer of 1898, travel over the route was directly up the valley floor following the river banks, sand bars, and old channel cut. This route could only be followed when the glaciers were not melting and water levels were low. Thus, only in the fall prior to freeze-up and in the spring when the deep snows had melted in the lower elevations, was this route used.

The Dalton Trail received most of its use during the summers of 1898 and 1899. By 1900, the Yukon and White Pass Railroad had been

completed between Skagway and Whitehorse, eliminating most of the hardships of that route. What advantage the Dalton Trail had over the rugged Chilkoot and White Pass routes was quickly lost when passenger and freight rail service became available.

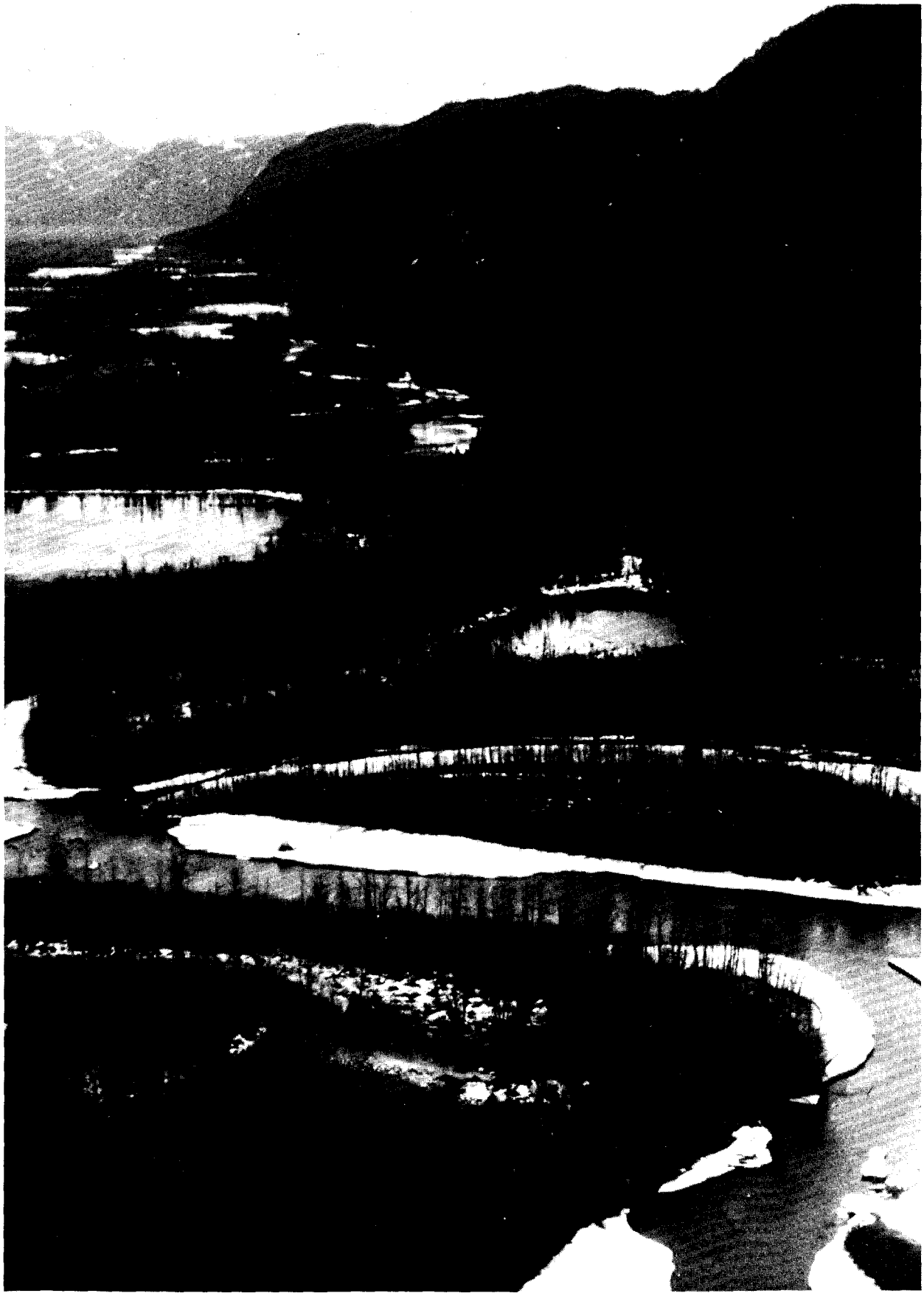
Although the Dalton Trail traversed an easier pass from the Lynn Canal to the interior gold fields, it never attracted the numbers of stampeders that went over the nearby Chilkoot and White Pass Trails. While easier, the Dalton Trail was considerably longer than the other two--300 miles as opposed to 40 or 50 miles.

The largest traffic over the trail consisted of livestock. The Dalton Trail was well suited for horses, cattle, and sheep and played an important role in supplying booming Dawson with meat and pack animals. Over 2,000 head of cattle and 2,000 horses passed over the trail in the summer of 1898. Dalton charged $2 a head for cattle and $2.50 a horse for use of his trail. Animals were taken as far as Rink Rapid and sometimes Fort Selkirk where they were transferred to scows and floated down the Yukon to Dawson.

The trail also played a part in the famous U. S. Reindeer Relief Expedition. The food crisis in Dawson in the winter of 1897-98 prompted Congress to appropriate $200,000 for the purchase of a reindeer herd to ship north to the Yukon. Over 500 reindeer were shipped from Norway, brought across the United States to Seattle by rail, then shipped to Haines. With no feed for them at Haines, most starved to death before reaching the lichens in the alpine areas. They were driven over the Dalton Trail and northward to Dawson and encountered so many obstacles and tortures that only 114 animals reached their destination nearly a year later in January 1899. Needless to say, the food crisis had long since passed and it was the relief expedition which ended up having to be aided.

Jack Dalton also started the Dalton Pony Express Company during the summer of 1898. With 250 saddle horses, he attempted to establish passenger service between the port at Haines and river steamers operating between Dawson and Rink Rapid. For $150 (Burton reports $250), travelers could bridge the gap in water transportation and avoid the perilous Chilkoot and White Pass routes. However, the company soon went under when steamers began operating on the lakes in the upper Yukon between Whitehorse and the Chilkoot and White Pass, facilitating travel over those routes. Similarly, mail was carried by Dalton's Pony Express only once before being directed to the lake steamer route.

The gold strike on Porcupine Creek in the summer of 1898 brought 1,000 people into the local area during the next year--many coming over the Dalton Trail. In the early 1900's, however, the establishment of Fort William H. Seward outside Haines shifted the attention



The Chilkat River paralleling the Dalton Trail, 10 miles north of Haines. (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation)

from the Pyramid Harbor area to the east side of Chilkat Inlet. Soon a new trail, the Throp's Trail, was established which ran from Haines along the east side of the Chilkat River, opposite the Dalton Trail, to above Klukwan where it crossed the Klehini to Porcupine. By 1916, the Alaska Road Commission had constructed a wagon road along this route to Porcupine and automobiles could drive as far as Klukwan. In 1943, the Army constructed the Haines Cutoff to the Alcan Highway, generally paralleling the old Dalton Trail from the border, through British Columbia, and into the Yukon Territory. The road was opened to the public in 1947.

Historic Trail Remnants

Virtually all of the historic Dalton Trail in the United States is now either overgrown with brush and trees or destroyed by changing river courses or modern logging roads. Because of the abundance of precipitation, plant growth and decay is relatively rapid and historic trail evidence has virtually disappeared.

At least one old cabin is present along the trail alignment and several old structures exist at Porcupine. The ages of these structures are not known, but it is doubtful that any date back to the turn of the century. Remains of the old Canadian customs building are present at the border.

Tools and implements have been found along the nearby historic Chilkoot Trail and it is reasonable to expect that such historic items associated with early use might still exist along the Dalton Trail.

Related Historic Sites

Two sites associated with this trail are listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Fort William H. Seward and Pleasant Camp.

Fort Seward was entered on the Register April 11, 1972, and is located in the City of Haines. For many years, this fort was the largest in Alaska with 85 buildings and 400 soldiers. Many of the buildings are still standing and in private use today.

Pleasant Camp was entered July 5, 1973, and is located at the Canadian border. This site consists of the remains of the first Canadian customs building later used for the U. S. Customs building and as a roadhouse.

In addition to these sites, the abandoned town of Porcupine is still in evidence, although most of the remaining buildings date back to later mining done in the 1920's and 1930's. This townsite has been studied by the Alaska Division of Parks and was identified as having regional significance and a potential for historic interpretation.

Predating all these sites is the Chilkat Indian village of Klukwan. This site has been inhabited continuously for hundreds of years. In 1880, Aurel Krause reported the village to have 65 houses and 500-600 people. Approximately 100 persons now reside in the village.

Historic Significance

The Dalton Trail played a short but important role in the Klondike Gold Rush. Only a fraction of the reported 30,000 to 50,000 people who crossed Chilkoot and White Pass Trails traversed the Dalton. However, this trail was much better suited for animals, and a substantial number of those reaching Dawson in 1898 and 1899 came up this r route. These animals were extremely important to the food supply of Dawson which depended almost entirely on outside sources.

The Dalton Trail was unique in the Alaska-Klondike Gold Rush in that it was the only trail built largely by one man and successfully operated as a toll trail. Viewed as a monument to private enterprise, Jack Dalton's trail was indeed remarkable. While gate crashers and poor management made attempts at establishing toll roads and trails elsewhere short-lived, Dalton successfully enforced his tolls, even at gunpoint, during the life of his trail.

The Dalton Trail also played a role in the early rush to the gold strike at Porcupine. Jack Dalton himself eventually bought up many of the claims. This gold mining area was regionally significant and produced about $150,000 a year between 1898 and 1906. A total production of around $1.2 million was achieved up to 1916. This represents about one-half of the total placer gold production in southeastern Alaska between 1880 and 1970.

PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE TRAIL USES

Present Trail Condition

No maintained hiking-type trail presently exists along the United States portion of the historic route. Over approximately half the route in the upper valley, a logging road(s) exists. This road is suited to use by four-wheel drive vehicles much of its distance in dry weather, although stream crossings may prevent passage during high water. A few miles of logging road immediately below Porcupine are fit only for use by foot or on motorcycle.

Dense underbrush prevents any travel along other sections of the historic route.

Scenic and Recreational Qualities

The scenery along the Chilkat and Klehini River valleys excells. High glacier-covered peaks tower above the valleys. A lush forest provides

a variety of color contrasts to the rock and snow above. Many small streams have cut deep intersecting canyons and the heavy runoff provides spectacular cascades of water.

The presence of a highway along the north side of the valley and of logging roads and logged areas reduces wilderness characteristics. However, the ease of access provides high potential for family use, day use, and for a variety of recreational activities such as picnicking, short hiking, photography, off-road vehicle use, wildlife observation, and others. The concentration of bald eagles during certain months is a significant recreation attraction.

Recreational Use

Present recreational uses of the historic trail route are limited to those sections where logging roads have maintained an open corridor through the dense forest and brush. Day hikes of up to 15 miles are possible from the bridge crossing of the Klehini above Klukwan to the vicinity of Pleasant Camp. The necessity to ford glacial streams and rivers presents a considerable obstacle and safety hazard.

Recreational vehicle use is also taking place on the logging roads. Motorcycles and four-wheel drive vehicles cross to the south side of the Klehini at the bridge or ford the river near Porcupine. The Tsirku River can also be forded and the logging road can be followed southeast from there for 5 or 6 miles. There is limited snowmobile use of portions of the trail during the winter, as well as some cross-country skiing. Hunting and fishing are popular recreational pursuits throughout the area.

Much of the current recreational use is by local residents. Future use is expected to increase and to include larger numbers of tourists as Alaska visitation increases statewide. The absence of a well-maintained trail will continue to limit trail-oriented activities.

The Alaska Division of Parks has published a master development plan for the authorized Battery Point Recreation Area south of Haines. This plan identifies the historical and recreational importance of the Dalton Trail, Porcupine, and Pleasant Camp, among other resources in the area. The plan recommends that a portion of the Dalton Trail be brushed out and marked between Pleasant Camp and Porcupine for hiking use, and that all river crossings be upgraded, consistent with the period when constructed. Protection and visitor facilities are also recommended in the plan for Pleasant Camp and Porcupine.

The portion through Canada has not been studied or proposed for trail development by the Canadian Government, British Columbia, or the Yukon Territory.

Nonrecreational Uses

Some subsistence hunting, fishing, and trapping, primarily by residents of Klukwan, may occur along the historic route.

Logging is a leading factor in the local economy and several areas along the trail are being actively logged. This activity is expected to continue in the future.

Although gold is still being sought in the Porcupine area, this activity is sporadic and the potential appears low.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Qualification for National Scenic Trail Designation

The criteria used in evaluating the Dalton Trail were as follows:

Criterion: Because of their special characteristics, National Scenic Trails should be nationally significant and be capable of attracting visitors throughout the United States.

Finding: The Dalton Trail cannot be considered as significant as the Chilkoot and White Pass Trails. However, the Dalton Trail was an international trail and played an important role in the initial development of Dawson and the Klondike gold fields. It is unique in that it is the only Alaskan gold rush trail built and operated as a toll road largely by one man, Jack Dalton.

Looking at only the segment in the United States, it is doubtful whether it has the potential to draw visitors from throughout the United States. Even with an extension into Canada, the historical and recreational appeal probably could not successfully compete with the nearby Chilkoot and White Pass Trails.

Criterion: National scenic trails are designed for hiking and other compatible uses. The National Trails System Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment on these trails, except in certain circumstances.

Finding: Off-road vehicle uses, both recreational and for logging purposes, are currently taking place along the historic route (no trail as such exists). It would be possible to design a trail along the general route for hiking and other compatible purposes.

Criterion: National scenic trails of historical importance should adhere as accurately as possible to their principal historic routes.

Finding: Logging roads, the highway, and changing river channels have destroyed or overlain various segments of the trail. In addition,

logging roads and logging areas cover substantial portions of the route and would adversely affect scenic and recreational qualities. However, a fairly close alignment of the historic route is still possible.

Criterion: National scenic trails should be provided with adequate public access through connecting local or regional trails. Access should be located at reasonable intervals to provide for trips of various lengths.

Finding: The presence of a paralleling road affords abundant access. The presence of the road offers potential for a variety of short hikes.

Criterion: National scenic trails should be primarily land based.

Finding: The Dalton Trail is land based.

Criterion: National scenic trails should be of sufficient length to encompass and provide appropriate access to the resources which are a basis for the trails designation.

Finding: The United States portion of the Dalton Trail was approximately 55 miles long. The total distance to Fort Selkirk, including the Canadian portion, was 305 miles. It is not known whether the potential for an extended trail over the entire 305 miles exists. However, the Haines Highway roughly parallels this route for approximately 140 miles and the Alcan Highway parallels it for an additional 30 miles to near Rink Rapid.

Criterion: National scenic trails should be continuous except where no practicable or feasible interconnection exists.

Finding: Except for stream crossings and the presence of logging roads, no major obstacles to a continuous trail exist in the United States. However, in several places, changing river channels and the presence of tidal flats would require relocation of the old route. Because of dense forests and extremely steep terrain, such construction would be very difficult and costly in places.

It is not known if a continuous trail through Canada is feasible.

Conclusions

The Dalton Trail from Pyramid Harbor to the Canadian border does not appear to meet the guidelines established for national scenic trails. While there are interesting historical values associated with the Dalton Trail, its historical significance does not rank with either the nearby Chilkoot or White Pass Trails and it is doubtful whether visitation would be attracted from beyond the local area. The presence

of a paralleling road, logging roads, and logging areas and its short length also contribute to this disqualification. The Dalton Trail did extend several hundred miles into Canada. It is not known what the recreational trail potential of an extended Canadian segment might be. Neither the Canadian Federal Government nor the governments of British Columbia or the Yukon have studied the Canadian route or proposed any trail development. Should all or portions of the Canadian route be studied by the respective Canadian governments, the Dalton Trail through the United States should be reexamined.

Recommendations

It is recommended that no further consideration be given the Dalton Trail at this time for inclusion in the National Trails System. Because of growing tourism in this area, due to the ferry terminal and highway link with the Alcan Highway, the potential for high-use trail-oriented recreation is excellent. It is recommended that the Haines Borough and the State of Alaska examine various segments of the route for possible protection and development and, where appropriate, designation as national recreation trails.

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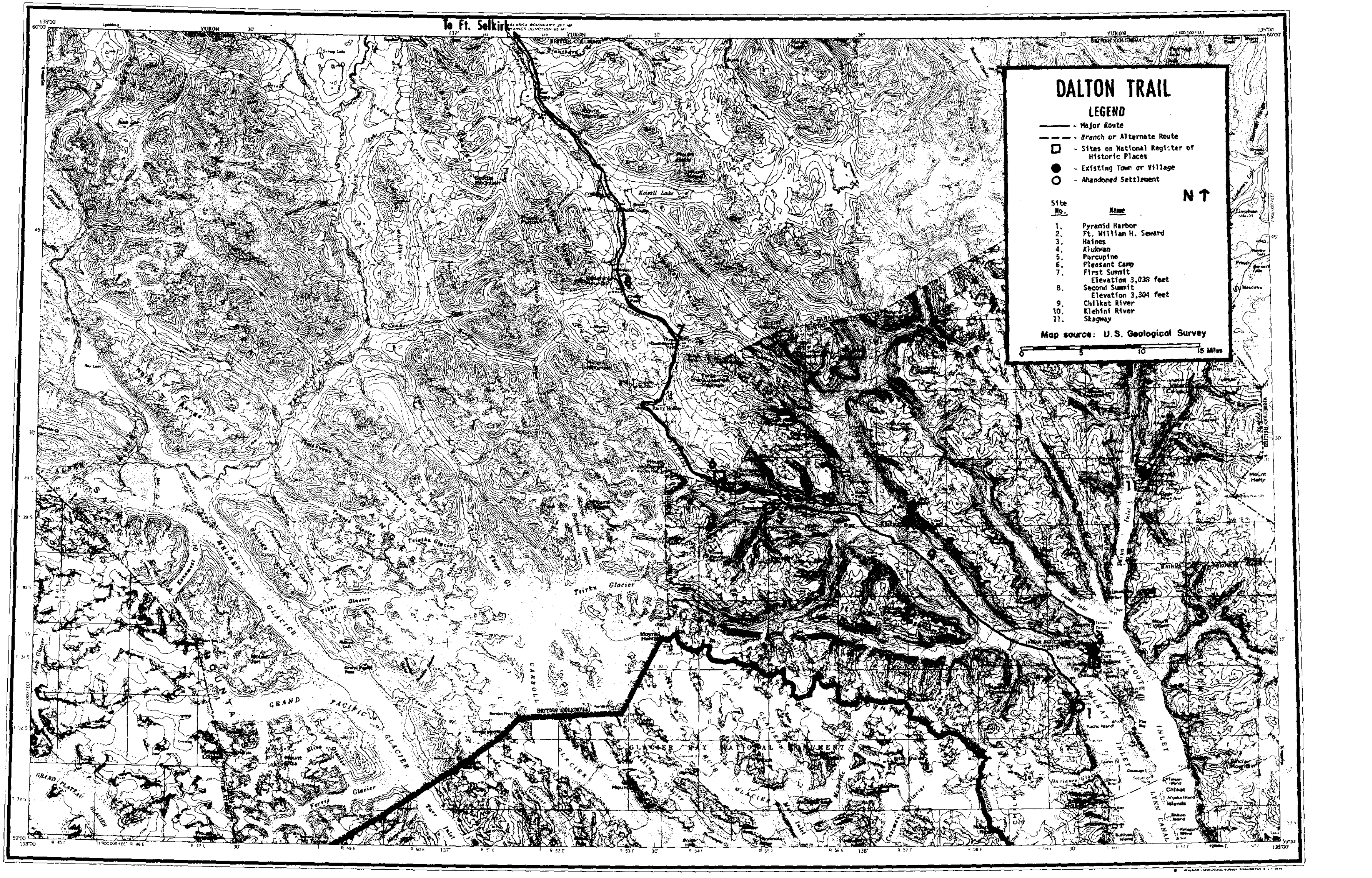
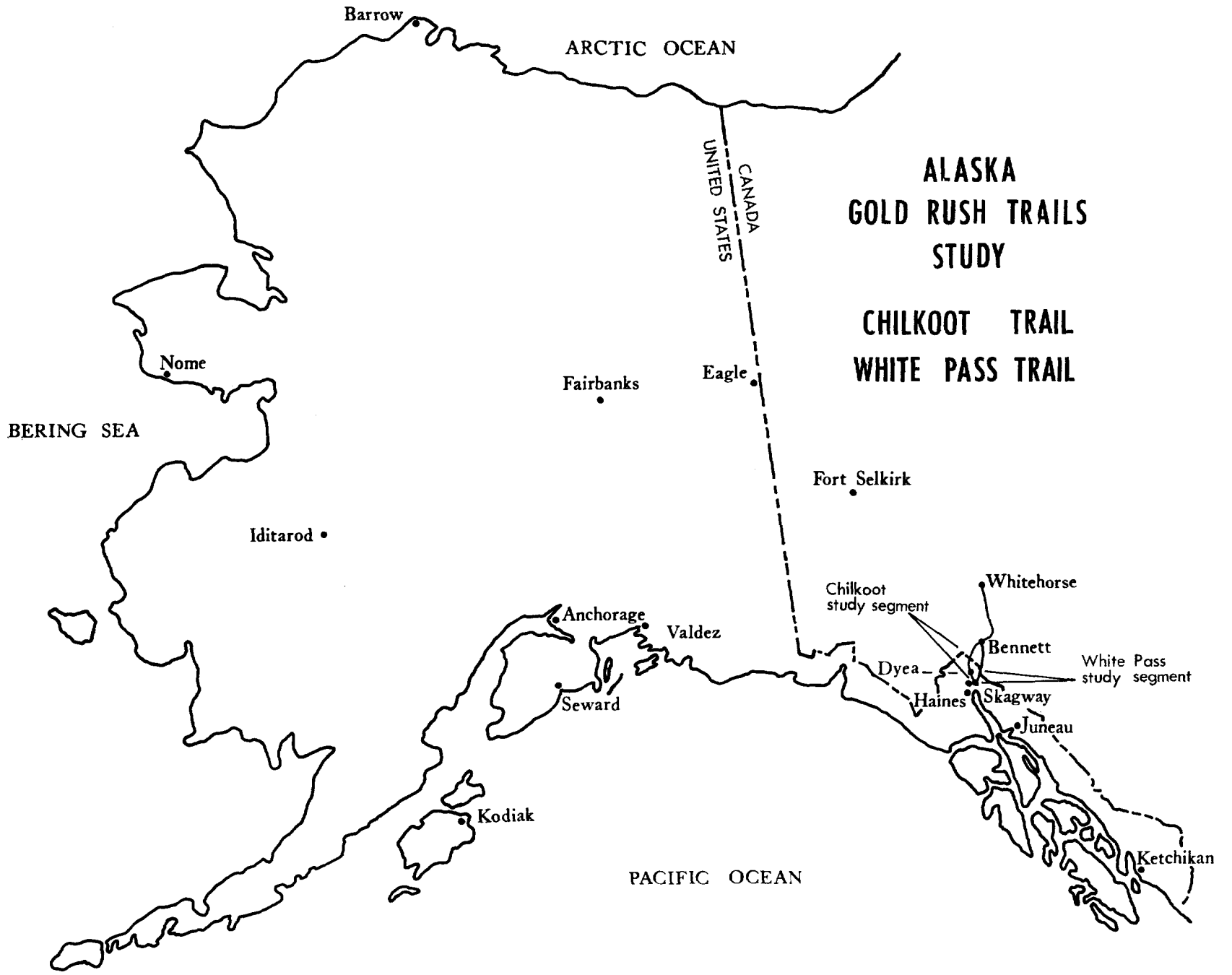


To Ft. Selkirk
DALTON TRAIL
LEGEND
- Major Route
- Branch or Alternate Route
- Sites on National Register of Historic Places
- Existing Town or Village
- Abandoned Settlement
N
Site No. Name
1. Pyramid Harbor
2. Ft. William H. Seward
3. Haines
4. Klukwan
5. Porcupine
6. Pleasant Camp
7. First Summit Elevation 3,038 feet
8. Second Summit Elevation 3,304 feet
9. Chilkat River
10. Klehini River
11. Skagway
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
0 5 10 15 Miles
YUKON
BRITISH COLUMBIA
GRAND PACIFIC GLACIER
GLACIER BAY NATIONAL MONUMENT
CHILKAT INLET
LYNN CANAL

Chilkoot and White Pass Trails


Barrow
ARCTIC OCEAN
CANADA
UNITED STATES
ALASKA
GOLD RUSH TRAILS
STUDY
CHILKOOT TRAIL
WHITE PASS TRAIL
Nome
Fairbanks
Eagle
BERING SEA
Fort Selkirk
Iditarod
Chilkoot
study segment
Whitehorse
Anchorage
Valdez
Bennett
White Pass
study segment
Dyea
Seward
Haines
Skagway
Juneau
Kodiak
Ketchikan
PACIFIC OCEAN

CHILKOOT AND WHITE PASS TRAILS

Prior to the passage of the National Trails System Act in October of 1968, there had been considerable interest in Skagway and the White Pass Trail and Dyea and the Chilkoot Pass Trail because of their importance during the Gold Rush Era as the principal gateways to the Klondike. In 1967, the National Park Service (NPS) began reconnaissance studies of the two trails, the surrounding areas, and towns associated with the trails. A study report entitled, "Proposed Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park - Historic Resource Study," was published November 15, 1970. Further field reconnaissance was carried out by the NPS in 1971. These efforts resulted in a May 1973 master plan entitled, "Proposed Klondike Gold Rush - National Historical Park/Alaska-Washington." This was followed by a draft environmental impact statement in April 1974. Legislation was introduced, in Congress and on June 30, 1976, the President signed Public Law 94-323 creating the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park.

The following information about the basic resources of the Chilkoot and White Pass Trails is primarily based on the earlier NPS studies.

Joint conclusions and recommendations for both the Chilkoot and White Pass Trails follow individual descriptions of each trail.

CHILKOOT TRAIL

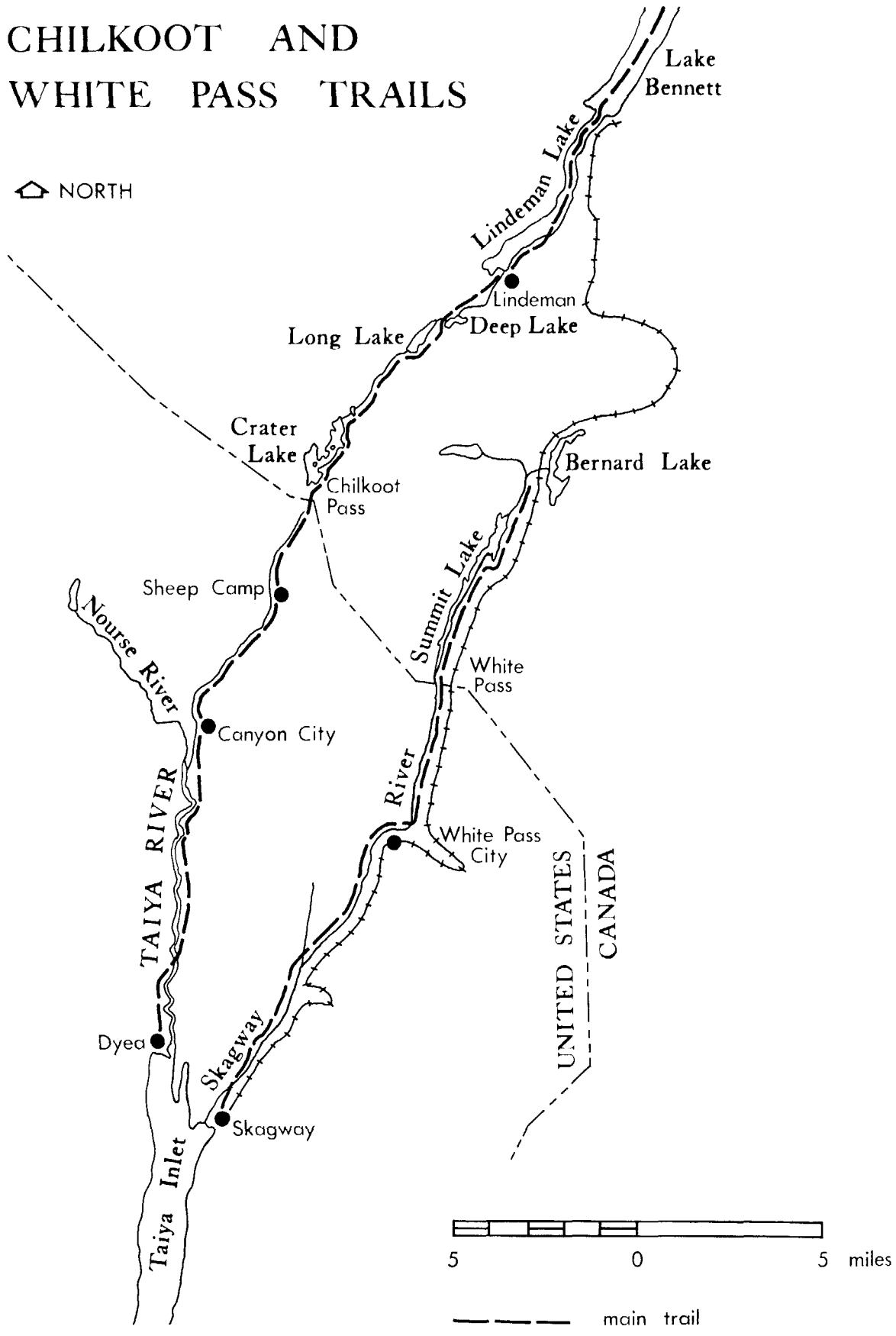
Background

In 1878, a Yukon prospector named George Hart crossed the coast range via Chilkoot Pass. By 1886, 200 more prospectors had crossed the Chilkoot Pass on their way to the Yukon gold fields. John Jerome Healy started a trading post at the head of Taiya Inlet (Dyea) just before the 1896 Klondike gold strike. In 1897, a tramway to the summit was built by Archie Burns to aid in carrying the prospectors' supplies. During the winter of 1897-98, following the 1896 Klondike gold strikes, over 22,000 men crossed the Chilkoot Pass on their way to the Klondike.

Location and Regional Environment

The Chilkoot Trail lies in the extreme northern portion of southeastern Alaska. It originates at the head of Taiya Inlet, then proceeds up the Taiya River valley, crossing the river several times, to the 30 degree final slope up Chilkoot Pass. The trail length in Alaska is approximately 16 miles. It then continues approximately 18 miles into Canada, from the border to Lake Bennett.

The climate is influenced by both interior and maritime weather patterns. The Coastal Mountains rise abruptly from sea level to 7,000 feet. Glaciers and lake-filled cirques crown the high elevations. Winds are strong from both the ocean and the interior. Up to 200


CHILKOOT AND
WHITE PASS TRAILS
NORTH
Lake
Bennett
Lindeman Lake
Lindeman
Deep Lake
Long Lake
Crater
Lake
Chilkoot
Pass
Bernard Lake
Sheep Camp
Nourse River
Summit Lake
White
Pass
Canyon City
TAIYA RIVER
River
White Pass
City
UNITED STATES
CANADA
Dyea
Skagway
Skagway
Taiya Inlet
5
0
5 miles
main trail

inches of precipitation, mainly in the form of snow, fall at the upper elevations. Vegetation varies from a coastal rain forest with its many coniferous trees, to subalpine and boreal forest with both coniferous and deciduous trees, to alpine tundra and meadow.

Access to the Chilkoot Trail is by boat and by trail from Skagway. Air, water, and rail transportation are available to Skagway. Access on the Canadian end of the trail is afforded by the White Pass and Yukon Railroad from Whitehorse to Bennett at the head of Lake Bennett. Land ownership is mixed between the U. S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the State.

Historic Resources

The Chilkoot Trail, along with the nearby White Pass Trail, carried the majority of gold seekers to the Klondike gold fields. A great rivalry grew between businessmen of Dyea and Skagway, the beginning of the White Pass Trail, both seeking prospectors' trade. Completion of a railroad across White Pass to Lake Bennett in 1899 heralded the decline of Dyea by offering an easier means to the Yukon gold fields and helped Skagway obtain most of the trade. By the early 1900's, the town of Dyea, the beginning of the trail, was a ghost town. By the late 1960's, the Chilkoot Trail had virtually disappeared.

Present and Prospective Trail Uses

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources, in cooperation with the Alaska Division of Corrections, has restored most of the Alaska portion of the Chilkoot Trail. The original trail alignment is being followed as closely as possible. Two shelter cabins, designed to sleep eight, have been built. On the Canadian side, the Yukon Department of Corrections has undertaken restoration and maintenance of the trail from Lake Bennett to the summit. The National Park Service reports that 1,800 people hiked the trail in 1976. The Chilkoot Trail passes through a highly scenic area of Alaska and Canada.

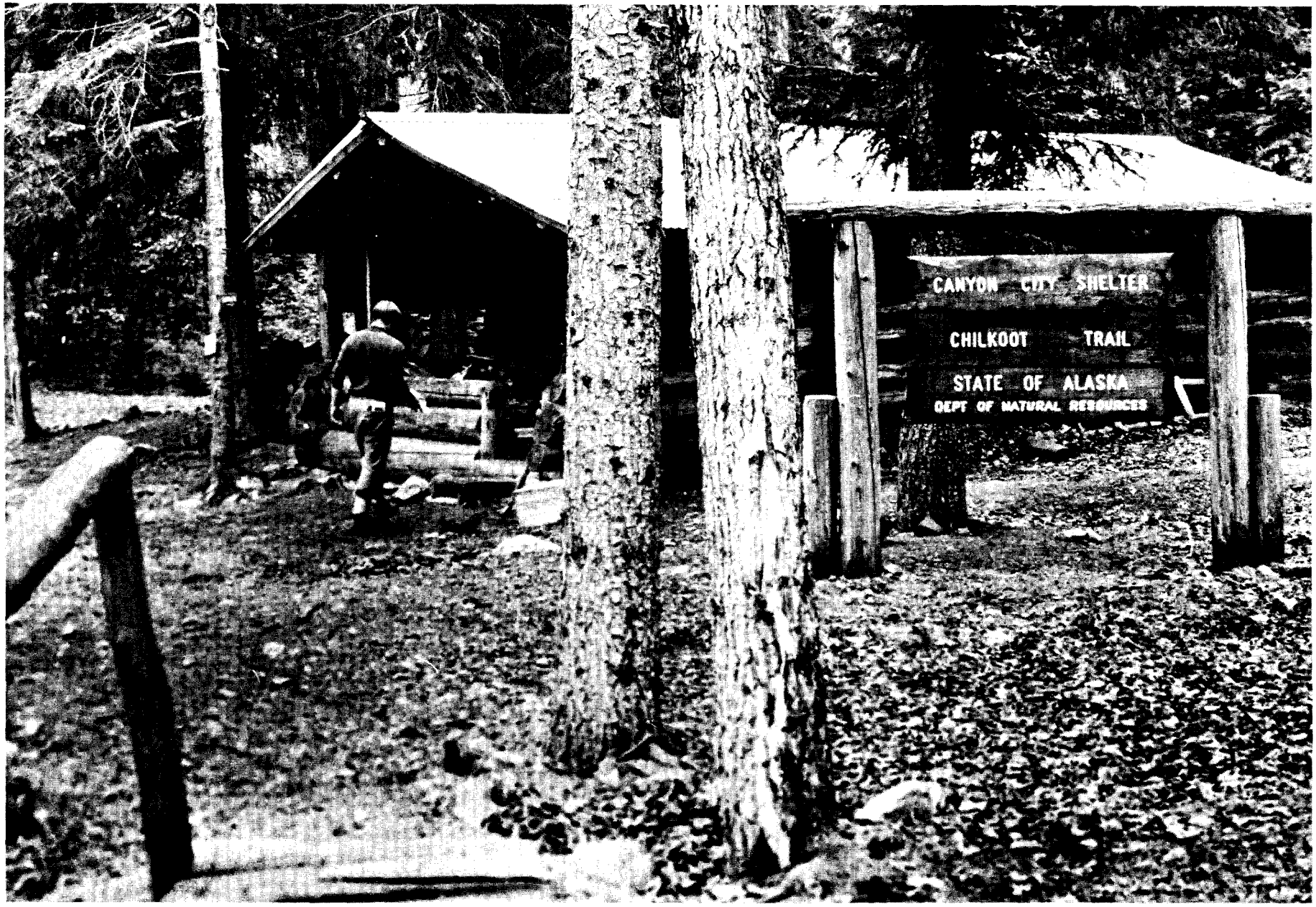
Qualification Criteria for National Scenic Trail Designation

The criteria used in evaluating the Chilkoot Trail were as follows:

Criterion: Because of their special characteristics, National Scenic Trails should be nationally significant and be capable of attracting visitors throughout the United States.

Finding: The Chilkoot Trail is a nationally significant gold rush trail in that it played a major role in the initial development of the Klondike gold fields. It presently is a popular recreational attraction, drawing visitors from throughout the United States.

Healy and Wilson's store at Dyea. This trading post, established in the mid-1880's, was managed by Sam Herron during the days of '97 and '98. (National Archives)



Canyon City Shelter on the Chilkoot Trail. (National Park Service)

Criterion: National Scenic Trails are designed for hiking and other compatible uses. The National Trails System Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment on these trails, except in certain circumstances.

Finding: Present use of the trail is only by hikers.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails of historical importance should adhere as accurately as possible to their principal historic routes.

Finding: Those portions of the trail already restored adhere to the principal historic route. Opportunity exists to restore the remaining portions in like manner.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be provided with adequate public access through connecting local or regional trails. Access should be located at reasonable intervals to provide for trips of various lengths.

Finding: The Chilkoot Trail is accessible from both the American and Canadian ends. In addition, a local trail exists from Skagway to the head of Taiya Inlet, and additional connecting recreation trails leading from the Chilkoot to proposed recreation sites are proposed in the NPS master plan.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be primarily land based.

Finding: The United States portion of the Chilkoot Trail is entirely land based.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be of sufficient length to encompass and provide appropriate access to the resources which are a basis for the trails designation.

Finding: The portion of the Chilkoot Trail in the United States is only 16 miles in length.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be continuous except where no practicable or feasible interconnection exists.

Finding: Except for stream crossings, no major obstacles to a continuous trail exist in the United States. On the Canadian side, the Yukon Department of Corrections has undertaken restoration and maintenance of the trail from Lake Bennett to the summit.

WHITE PASS TRAIL

Background

By 1886, the Chilkoot Pass had been crossed by many prospectors and explorers; however, the existence of nearby White Pass was unknown

except to Indians. Under the authorization of Thomas White, Canada's Minister of the Interior, an expedition was organized in 1887 to explore the Yukon River drainage within the Northwest Territories of Canada. The expedition was divided into three groups, with one group headed by William Ogilvie who was charged with running a traverse over Chilkoot Pass and defining the location of the 141st Meridian. While at Juneau, on the way to Taiya Inlet, Ogilvie heard stories of a low pass from the head of Taiya Inlet to the headwaters of the Yukon. After traversing the Chilkoot Trail to Lindeman Lake, Ogilvie sent Captain William Moore to search for the pass. Moore took a Stick Indian, who had been through the pass, to guide him. Moore ascended Skagway Valley to its head, examined the pass, and rejoined Ogilvie at Lindeman Lake. Moore thought a road could be built across this new pass and believed this would be the entry to the Klondike gold fields. Ogilvie named the pass White Pass in honor of Thomas White who authorized the expedition.

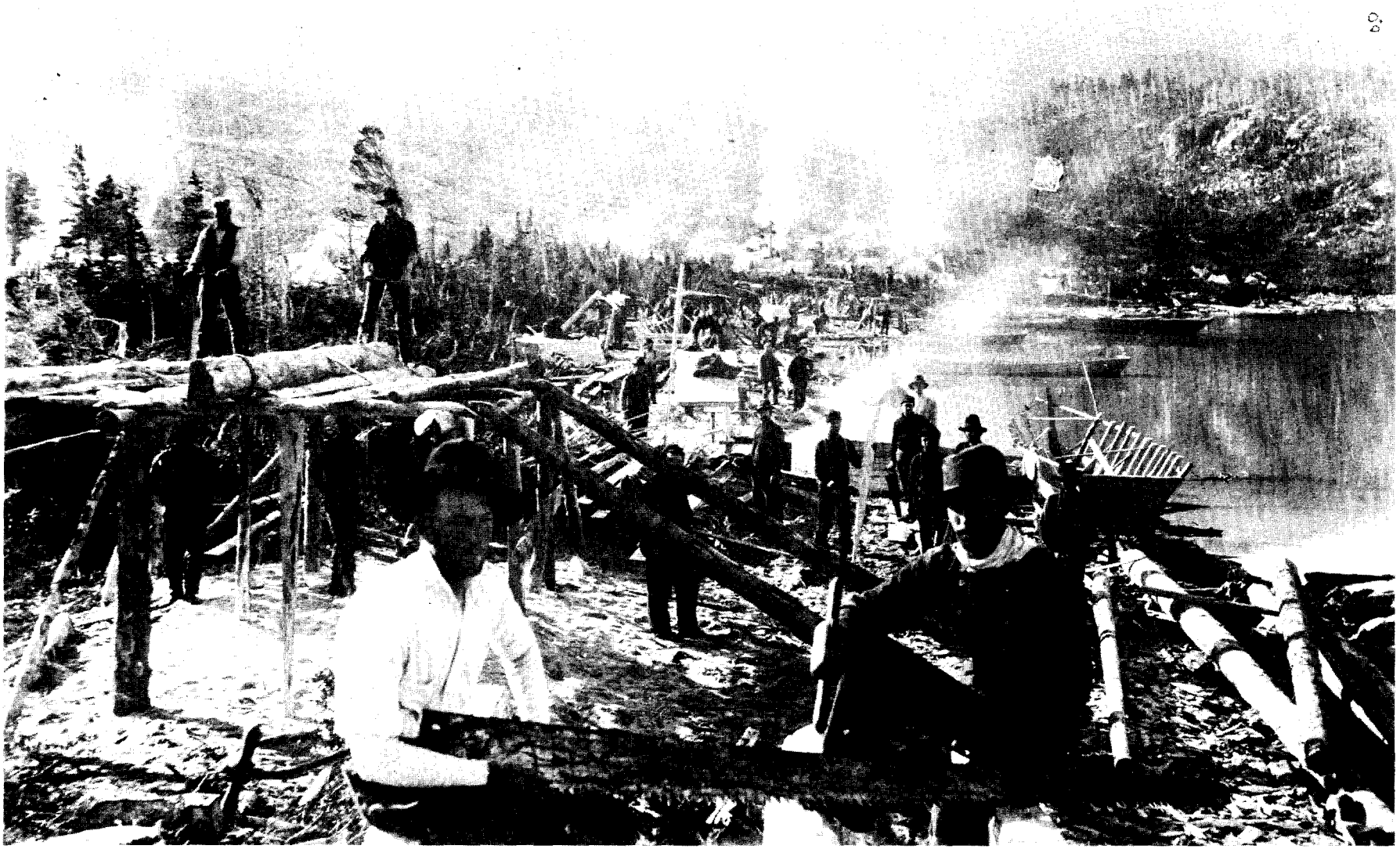
Captain William Moore felt so strongly about the future of White Pass that he and his son went back to the mouth of the Skagway River in October 1887 and started a town (Moorseville) and a trail over White Pass. But they were virtually ignored 10 years later by the thousands of prospectors headed for the Klondike. In 1897, the prospectors formed a government and town which they named Skagway. During the gold rush, Skagway became famous and by 1899 had become the largest Alaskan city with a population of about 10,000. First the trail, then the Brackett Wagon Road, and finally the White Pass and Yukon Railroad were constructed from Skagway across White Pass during this period. Thousands of gold seekers, together with their belongings, used the route on their way to the Klondike.

Location and Regional Environment

The White Pass Trail lay in the extreme northern portion of southeastern Alaska. It originated near the head of Taiya Inlet at the mouth of the Skagway River, crossed the river in several places, then made the final but relatively gentle climb to White Pass. Although not steep, the final segment to the pass was narrow, extremely rocky, and often impassable. The trail length in Alaska was approximately 16 miles. It then extended approximately 29 miles in Canada, from the border to Lake Bennett. The White Pass Trail converged with the Chilkoot Trail at Lake Bennett with the remaining distance to the Klondike gold fields being by boat.

Located only 10 air miles south of the Chilkoot Trail, the White Pass Trail traversed the same coastal mountains and received similar high winds and heavy precipitation.

Today, air and water access is available to Skagway. Rail access is also available in Canada from Whitehorse. A road between Skagway and Carcross, Yukon Territory, following the lower reaches of the White



Boat building at Lindeman City, summer of 1897. At Lindeman City many of the adventurers halted to build boats to carry them and their outfits the 500 miles separating them from the Klondike. The rest halted and built boats on Lake Bennett. (La Roche Collection, Library of Congress)

Pass Trail between Skagway and White Pass City, is under construction. Plans are for the road to cross West White Pass which would be the route least disturbing to the historic trail. Only a few miles of the road have been constructed.

Land ownership along the trail in Alaska is mixed between the U. S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, proposed State selection lands, and the City of Skagway.

Historic Resources

Both Skagway and Dyea became famous together with their respective trails. Both cities competed for the prospectors' business. The construction of the Brackett Wagon Road and particularly the White Pass and Yukon Railroad gave the edge to Skagway and the White Pass Trail. Skagway remained for many years as the main point of departure into the Yukon following the Klondike Gold Rush, and is now a popular tourist area.

Today, only portions of the trail remain, mainly in the Dead Horse Gulch area. Most of the lower part of the trail was replaced by the wagon road and railroad and later by a highway. The railroad remains in place and is still used. Several historic structures continue standing in Skagway, most notably the railroad properties.

Present and Prospective Trail Uses

The area through which the trail passed remains scenic as well as interesting because of the great variety of terrain and life zones. Although traces of the trail remain, they are abandoned and unused. The National Park Service proposes restoring some portions and interpreting the trail and its related historic resources.

Qualification Criteria for National Scenic Trail Designation

The criteria used in evaluating the White Pass Trail were as follows:

Criterion: Because of their special characteristics, National Scenic Trails should be nationally significant and be capable of attracting visitors throughout the United States.

Finding: The White Pass Trail is a nationally significant gold rush trail in that it played a major role in the initial development of the Klondike gold fields. Although much of the trail is obliterated, it still draws visitors from throughout the United States who travel the railroad to view the area.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails are designed for hiking and other compatible uses. The National Trails System Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment on these trails.

Hikers approaching Chilkoot Pass. (National Park Service)

Finding: A railroad and highway traverse the historic trail along much of its lower length in Alaska.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails of historical importance should adhere as accurately as possible to their principal historic routes.

Finding: The railroad and the highway overlie much of the original trail.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be provided with adequate public access through connecting local or regional trails. Access should be located at reasonable intervals to provide for trips of various lengths.

Finding: Good access to the trail route exists at Skagway and from the railway and highway. Proposed in the NPS master plan are recreation trails leading to proposed recreation sites.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be primarily land based.

Finding: The White Pass Trail is land based.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be of sufficient length to encompass and provide appropriate access to the resources which are a basis for the trails designation.

Finding: The portion of the original White Pass Trail in the United States was approximately 16 miles, with an additional 29 miles in Canada to Lake Bennett. From Lake Bennett, the remaining distance to the Klondike gold fields was by boat.

Criterion: National Scenic Trails should be continuous except where no practicable or feasible interconnection exists.

Finding: Much of the trail is now overlain with a railroad and highway and so is not continuous. The NPS proposes studies with Canada for the future restoration and interpretation of the trail in the White Pass summit area and extension to Lake Bennett.

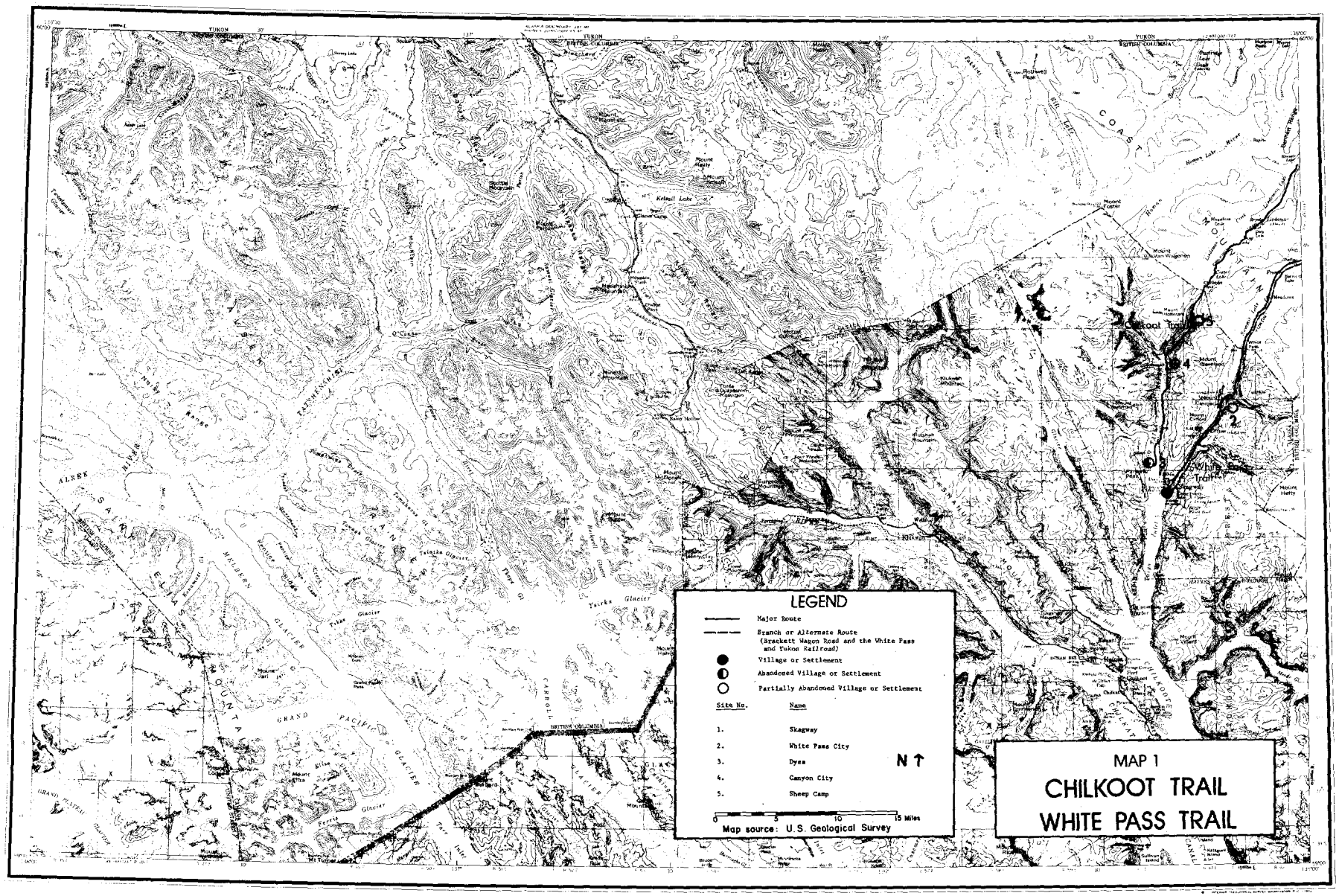
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The Chilkoot and White Pass Trails are nationally significant gold rush trails that played major roles in the initial development of the Klondike gold fields. They were studied in depth by the National Park Service and legislation has now been enacted by Congress establishing a Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park. Plans developed by the Park Service should protect the remaining segments of these trails and fully utilize them in providing and encouraging public use.

Recommendations

Based on the enactment of legislation authorizing establishment of the Klondike National Historic Park and plans prepared by the National Park Service for the area, no further efforts should be made at this time to seek their inclusion in the National Trails System. One or both trails would likely meet the criteria for designation as National Historic Trails, should the National Trails System Act be amended to include that category. In the meantime, their protection and use for public purposes seems assured as a result of the recent authorization of a Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park which encompasses the United States portions of the two trails.


LEGEND
Major Route
Branch or Alternate Route (Brackett Wagon Road and the White Pass and Yukon Railroad)
Village or Settlement
Abandoned Village or Settlement
Partially Abandoned Village or Settlement
Site No. Name
1. Skagway
2. White Pass City
3. Dyea
4. Canyon City
5. Sheep Camp
N
0 5 10 15 Miles
Map source: U.S. Geological Survey
MAP 1
CHILKOOT TRAIL
WHITE PASS TRAIL

Appendix

JAY S. HAMMOND
GOVERNOR

STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

July 26, 1977

The Honorable Cecil Andrus
Secretary of the Interior
United States Department of
the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This is in response to your letter of June 1, requesting comments on the Department's proposed report on the Gold Rush Trails of Alaska.

The State of Alaska supports an active program to identify, protect, and preserve its historic resources. Much of this activity is supported in part by assistance provided through your department under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act. We have a history of cooperative activity with the federal government in such work and look forward to continuing it.

We support the concept of designation of the Seward to Nome route as a National Historic Trail. It is our understanding that the Department's legislative package on this trail addresses the problems that might arise if this long corridor diagonally transecting our state was subject to the restrictions of Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act. Assuming that to be correct, we wholeheartedly endorse the draft study.

Sincerely,

Jay S. Hammond
Governor

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Assistant Secretary for Policy
Washington, D.C. 20230

JUL 6 1977

Honorable Cecil D. Andrus
Secretary of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Draft Report, "The Iditarod Trail (Seward-Nome Route) and Other Alaskan Gold Rush Trails." We concur with the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation's recommendation that the Iditarod Trail should be designated as a National Historic Trail within the National Trails System.

The Seward-Nome Route, because of its important historic role in Alaska's gold rush era and its scenic and recreational appeal, offers much to attract visitors and tourists to the area. Should the National Trails System Act be amended to include the Seward-Nome Route as a new National Historic Trail, the Commerce Department's United States Travel Service has indicated they will be pleased to work with your Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in promoting the use of this nationally significant and beautiful natural resource.

Sincerely,

Lucy Falcone

Lucy Falcone
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Policy Development
and Coordination

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

IR
MANPOWER,
RESERVE AFFAIRS
AND LOGISTICS

JUN 1977

Honorable Cecil D. Andrus
Secretary of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In response to your letter of June 1, 1977 to the Secretary, we have reviewed your Department's report on the Gold Rush Trails of Alaska, conducted pursuant to the National Trails System Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-543) and have no substantive comment to make thereon.

We appreciate your courtesy in making this study available for our review.

Sincerely yours,

Perry J. Fliakas
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Installations and Housing)

FEDERAL ENERGY ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20461

JUL 6 1977

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

Honorable Cecil Andrus
Secretary of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This is in response to your letter of June 1, 1977, which requested review and comment on the Department of the Interior's report on the Gold Rush Trails of Alaska, prepared pursuant to the National Trails System Act, P.L. 90-543. The report recommends that the entire Seward-Nome route be designated as a National Historic Trail within the National Trails System.

We have no comments on the report itself, although we note that page 39 describes significant mineral potential for the area underlying the Seward-Nome route. This suggests that legislation designating the route as a National Historic Trail not irrevocably preclude assessment of this potential and development if warranted. Such legislation should also allow for future crossings by transportation systems.

Sincerely,

John F. O'Leary
Administrator

THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

JUL 13 1977

Honorable Cecil D. Andrus
Secretary of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Cece:

We have completed a preliminary review of your Department's proposed report on the Gold Rush Trails of Alaska.

This report recommends the designation of the Seward-Nome (Iditarod) Trail as a National Historic Trail within the National Trails System. The President's environmental message proposed legislative action to amend the National Trails System Act, P.L. 90-543, to create this new category of trail. We understand that this designation is intended to provide for inclusion in the National Trails System of routes of historic significance which do not meet the strict criteria set up for National Scenic Trails, but which warrant greater recognition than the National Recreation Trail designation would afford.

Our preliminary review suggests no specific cause for concern with the proposed action. However, due to the length of the route and the complex conditions associated with the area in question, I believe it essential to solicit the assessment of appropriate DOT personnel at the field level. I am forwarding the report to them.

I appreciate your affording us the opportunity to review this report. As soon as our field comments are received, I will forward them to you.

Sincerely,

Brock

Brock Adams

THE SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C.. 20410

August 3, 1977

Honorable Cecil D. Andrus
Secretary of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This is in response to your letter of June 1, 1977 enclosing for review and comment a copy of the proposed report on the Gold Rush Trails of Alaska conducted under the National Trails System Act, P.L. 90-543.

Based on a Central Office review of the report, particularly the Seward-Nome Trail, we have no objection to the recommendation that the Seward-Nome Trail be designated to the National Trails System under the proposed new category of National Historic Trails. We note that seven different trails were considered and that careful delineations and selections have been made.

With respect to the proposal for legislation establishing a new category of trails, this appears to be well justified and we gladly concur. We assume that, if enacted, future proposals will be transmitted among the Federal agencies so that any particular questions may be raised and considered before final designations are made.

Since our Seattle Regional Office has primary responsibility for administering HUD programs in Alaska, I have requested Regional staff to review the draft report and inform me as to whether any significant environmental impacts beyond those identified in the report will likely occur, particularly those related to the few urban areas on the trail.

My concurrence on this particular trail is subject to any specific recommendations on environmental concerns which our Seattle Regional Office may suggest. Should the Regional Office make specific recommendations which alter my present view, I will advise you promptly.

Sincerely,

Pat

Patricia Roberts Harris

FEDERAL POWER COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20426

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Honorable Cecil Andrus
Secretary
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

SEP 14 1977

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This is in response to your letter of June 1, 1977, transmitting the "Draft, The Iditarod Trail (Seward-Nome Route) and other Alaskan Gold Rush Trails" dated April 1977 and requesting our comments thereon. Please excuse the delay in our response to your letter.

No objection is offered on the proposed designation of the Iditarod Trail as a National Historic Trail, however, I do note that the Trail crosses several power sites. The Eagle River site on the Eagle River proposed by the City of Anchorage has a contemplated installed capacity of 15,000 kW. Federal lands in the Eagle River site are withdrawn in Power Site Classification Nos. 107 and 399 and pursuant to the filing of the application for preliminary permit for Project No. 2405. The preliminary permit for Project No. 2405 expired on April 30, 1967, without the filing of an application for license, however, development of the site is being considered in the future planning for the Anchorage area. The Trail may also be crossed at Moose Pass by the tailrace of Project No. 1196, a 21 kW hydroelectric project. The project has been out of service since 1964 and the project license expired in 1974; however, the owners hope to redevelop the site.

Portions of the Iditarod Trail would be inundated by the development of any of the following hydroelectric sites as listed in the Commission's 1974 Alaska Power Survey:

1. The Yentna site on the Yentna River with a prime capacity of 72,500 kW.

2. The Talachulitna site on the Skwentna River with a prime capacity of 37,500 kW.

3. The Skwentna site on the Skwentna River with a prime capacity of 49,000 kW.

4. The Crooked Creek site on the Kuskokwin River with a prime capacity of 1,070,000 kW.

5. The Holy Cross site on the Yukon River with a prime capacity of 1,400,000 kW.

The staff review indicates that there are several existing power transmission lines in the Seward-Anchorage area that may cross the proposed Iditarod Trail. There are no existing or planned natural gas pipelines in the area.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed National Historic Trail designation.

Sincerely,

Charles B. Curtis
Chairman

Acknowledgments

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the course of these studies of the Alaska Gold Rush Trails, valuable help was provided by many agencies, groups, and individuals. The assistance of the following is especially appreciated: Joe and Violet Redington, Iditarod Trails Committee; F. S. Pettyjohn, Editor, "Alaskana;" Sally Jo Collins; Barbara Winkley; Robert and Dorothy Clifton, Valdez Historical Society; William Quirk, III, Corps of Engineers; Brian Spiers, Yukon Territorial Archivist; William Hanable, Alaska State Division of Parks; David Nanney, past Executive Secretary, Haines Borough; Elizabeth Hakkinen, Haines Historical Society; Richard Folta; Charles Horner; Sam White; Carl Lottsfeldt (deceased), District Manager, Kuskokwim District, Alaska Roads Commission; and Gerry Timmons and Robert Lund, Bureau of Land Management.