CULTURAL VALUES

There are no known paleontological sites in the Portage area. Inquiries to the University of Alaska Museum of Paleontology and interviews with long-time residents of the area have not revealed any past fossil discoveries. The area has not had extensive mining or other ground disturbance, however, so it is possible fossil remains exist there which have not yet been discovered. On the other hand, no paleontological discoveries are known from the nearby Hope-Sunrise area in spite of the extensive placer mining carried on there in the past.

Geological studies of Turnagain Arm indicate that the Kenai Range dates from the Cretaceous period. During subsequent periods the area was extensively faulted and eroded. Glaciers repeatedly covered the area, gouging out broad U-shaped valleys and leaving some drift deposits in their wake. In the last major ice advance, glaciers filled the Turnagain Arm as far as Fire Island. In post-glacial times, the area has been subject to minor sea level changes correlated with minor glacial advances. In historic times the Portage area has been little modified, with the exception of local deposition of silt and gravel, and subsidence resulting from the 1964 earthquake.

Humans could theoretically have occupied the Portage locality soon after it was free of glaciation, but no prehistoric archeological sites are known in the area. The nearest evidence of prehistoric occupancy comes from recent excavations on outer Turnagain Arm (Reger 1976). This site at Beluga Point (ANC - 54) has produced evidence of an early Athapaskan-like core and blade industry comparable to materials from sites in

interior Alaska, and possibly dating to around 4500 B.C. These early cultural remains are overlain by evidence of later occupants who utilized an Eskimo-like maritime technology.

Elsewhere on Kenai Peninsula, evidence suggests that this Eskimoid technology had an earlier ascendency, but was in recent times replaced over much of the upper Cook Inlet area by an Athapaskan regime identifiable with the Tanaina group, who continued to occupy much of that area to the historic contact period. Although the Tanaina apparently utilized Turnagain Arm to some extent in historic times, early gold discoveries and the influx of Americans quickly disrupted their traditional lifeway. No historic Indian settlements are known from the Portage area, and siltation has covered any evidence of historic period villages.

A number of structures and activity sites of the recent historic period are present in the Portage area. None of the existing structures are known to be more than fifty years old.

Much of the early history of the area is poorly known. The Portage Pass route began to be used for access from Passage Canal (an ice-free winter port) to the Hope-Sunrise Mining district as early as 1896. Mary Barry (1973) relates two tragedies which occured on the glacier in 1896 and 1897. Before that the trail was used by Indians and Eskimos, and during the Russian period by Russians for travel between Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet. In 1898 Lt. H.G. Learnard, attached to the U.S. Army exploring expedition commanded by Captain Glenn, crossed Portage Pass to evaluate that route as part of their mission. An alternate route via Billings Creek, Carmen River, and Twentymile River was also explored, but was never utilized to any extent.

After the Hope-Sunrise gold fields were discovered, some prospecting and subsequent mining were undertaken on the north side of Turnagain Arm. This activity was mainly concentrated in the Glacier, Bird, Indian, and Rainbow Creek drainages, though a claim was filed on the third stream on the right up the Twentymile River around 1903. It is not known if that claim was ever mined to any extent. Evidence of hard-rock mining is apparently visible on the west side of Carmen Lake, and may be related to the 1903 discovery. The only other mining activity known in the area is a gold claim, now inactive, located on the north side of the Twentymile. Granite Creek had been prospected by 1904, and presumably Ingram Creek (called Quartz Creek then) was prospected at one time or another with negative results.

By 1905 the Portage trail extended through the Portage area around the north side of Turnagain Arm. A trail up the Twentymile River was also reportedly used for access to the Crow Pass Trail, and travel up the Placer River to Trail Creek also occured prior to railroad construction on that route. Around 1911 an improved trail was surveyed between Seward and Knik along the north side of Turnagain Arm. Two winter trails across Crow Pass and Indian Pass were used during the 1907 rush to the Iditarod district. A telegraph trail was also established from Anchorage around 1916 to facilitate railroad construction, but when the railroad was completed through this area, trail use was apparently largely discontinued.

Settlement in the Portage area appears to have begun largely with railroad construction. Though little is known about early railroad construction camps and associated logging camps in that area, a station house has

been located at Portage since the grade was completed there. Under the name Alaska Central Railway, track was completed to 52 miles from Seward by 1907. In October 1907 a financial panic sent the railway company into bankruptcy and receivership, and in 1910 it was renamed Alaska Northern Railway. The track was completed as far as Kern Creek at mile 70.5 by 1910 with funds raised on receivers certificates.

Though the exact location of the earliest Portage Station is unknown, Orth lists a station called Twentymile River Station on the railroad at the east end of Turnagain Arm reported by USGS fieldworkers in 1913. In 1949 the station was located near the present "Y" where the Seward-Whittier grades meet at mile 64 on the Seward route. However, the 1964 earthquake destroyed that building and a new station house was built near the Portage Glacier Road. This station house was destroyed by fire in the middle 1960's and rebuilt in the same location.

A flag-stop called "Moraine" also existed between Portage and Spencer (mile 59.3), reportedly at mile 62.5 in the 1920's. The section house and pump house located there were destroyed by fire in 1930 and the exact site of Moraine is unknown at this time.

Interviews with long-time residents indicate that tie-cutting was still a significant employment for some workers in the area in the early 1940's. Several "tie-hacker" camps in the vicinity of Portage produced ties and other timbers for the railroad. They may also have produced material for other construction, such as buildings and mining structures.

One sawmill was reportedly located north of the railroad just past the Twentymile River. The age of that mill is unknown. A later mill operated in the flat north of the highway in the northwest corner of the URA area, probably around 1974. Nothing remains of that mill today. Another small sawmill was reportedly located outside the URA area at the mouth of Seattle Creek in the late 1930's and early 1940's. Sawmill Creek, a small stream west of Seattle Creek, may also derive its name from a mill site there in the past. Orth reports that this name was used in 1899 by Lt. Heron.

A logging camp was also reportedly operated up the Twentymile River drainage by "Diamond Jim" Redmond from 1947-1949. A sixty-foot long building was apparently constructed at this camp on the third stream to the right. Used railroad timbers were supposedly used in the structure, so a winter road or tractor trail up the Twentymile may have been established in this period. Pilings on the first tributary to the left from the river may represent a bridge or similar structure of that period. Another logging camp, referred to locally as "Bird's Camp", was also located on the north side of Twentymile about two miles upstream.

Trapping was conducted on the Twentymile drainage in the 1940's and 1950's by Billy Miller, now a resident of Hope. His main line cabin was located on the third stream up the river on the north side, and first consisted of a cottonwood log cabin located on the flats near the river. After being flooded out, he rebuilt in 1951-1952 on the hillslope above the river. Another line cabin was located on the Twentymile opposite the tip of a point of land separating the Twentymile and Glacier Rivers.

A tent frame was constructed at the northeast end of Carmen Lake, and a cabin built by George Seagram some years earlier at the west end of the lake was also used by Miller. Miller also reports having found the remains of a log cache beyond the southwest end of the lake in that period. This was probably originally associated with the mining activity he noted on the hillside above it to the southeast.

On the Portage Creek drainage a clustering of recent buildings is located around extensive gravel quarry areas connected with construction of the Portage Glacier Road. No historical information could be found which relates to that drainage. It is interesting, however, that extensive glacier caves were found at the base of the glacier in 1969. Glacier caves are subject to continual change both from melting and ice movement. One passage was penetrated approximately 1500'. The caves are called Byron Glacier Caves by Howard Edwards.

On the Placer River drainage almost no historical information was garnered. It is reported, however, that a cabin located at mile 58 about 150 feet from the railroad was standing in the early 1950's. Trapping was conducted on this drainage in the 1940's and 1950's with moderate success by Bill Glassof, now a resident of Indian, but no line camps were maintained. Bill remembers a cabin on the ~~fault~~ Slt at the mouth of Ingram Creek (formally Quartz Creek) that had thirty-foot long walls. Deep silt now covers that area, and nothing visible remains. A small shed can however, still be seen in an enclave in the hill southeast of Ingram Creek just a few hundred feet from the present roadway.

Still there Sep 81

The highway was constructed through Portage to Girdwood in 1946-1947. The settlement of Portage increased in size after that period to include about 20 buildings and a population of approximately 70 people. After the 1964 earthquake many of the buildings were moved to Bird and Indian. Many of the remaining structures at Portage are collapsing, or are partly buried by silt now, and serve as a grim reminder of the devastating effects of the earthquake.

The Alaska Heritage Resource Survey lists the Old Portage Roadhouse site (SEW-100) located near mile 63 of the Alaska Railroad. The structure is no longer standing and its exact location is unknown. The Survey also lists the old Portage Station House site (SEW-123) located at mile 64 of the Alaska Railroad. This structure is also no longer standing and its exact location likewise unknown at this time. These sites are both considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Since the historic resources connected with the Alaska Railroad have been determined to be eligible for the National Register, the Moraine Station and Twentymile Station sites are likewise eligible.

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