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

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### Introduction

#### 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.

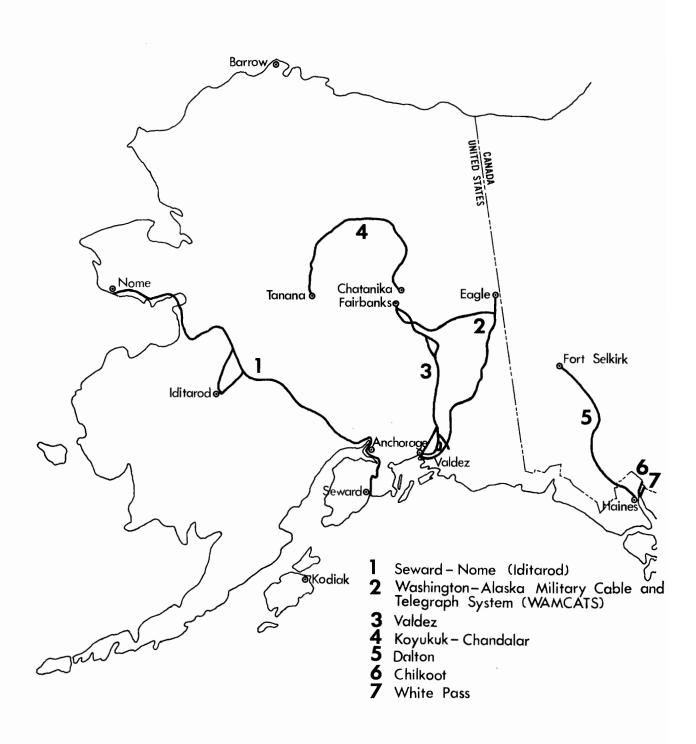
To the original list of five trails were added the Koyukuk-Chandalar Routes, also known as the Fairbanks-Wiseman Trail, and the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS), also referred to as the Valdez-Eagle-Big Delta Telegraph Line.

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.

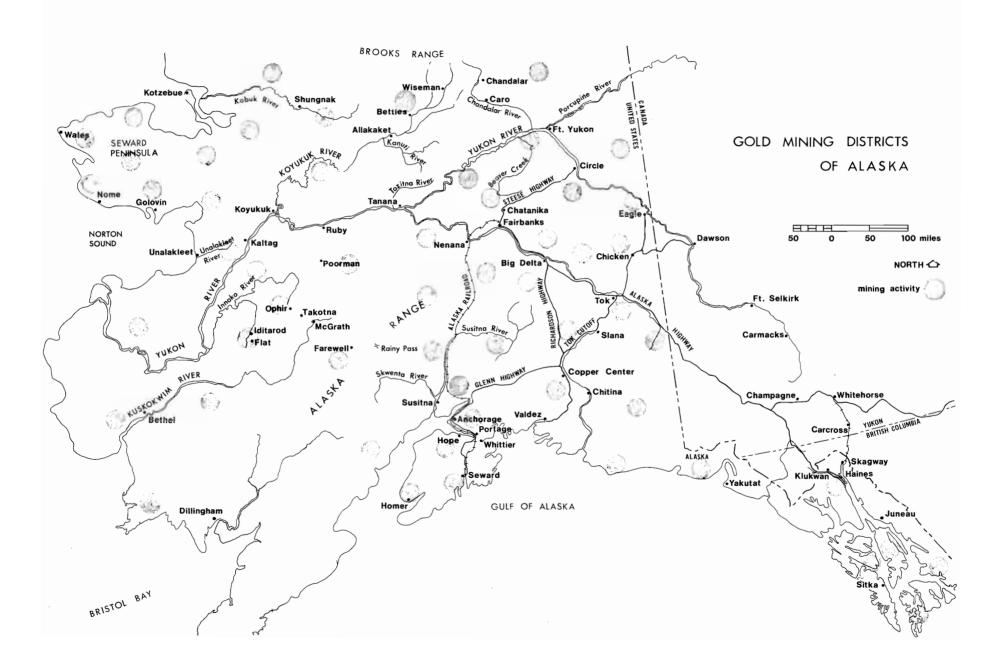
The second major stampede in the United States portion of the Yukon drainage began in 1893. Hundreds of men moved down the Yukon River from diggings along upstream tributaries to the boom town of Circle, located about 165 miles downriver from the United States-Canada border. During the rush of people 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.

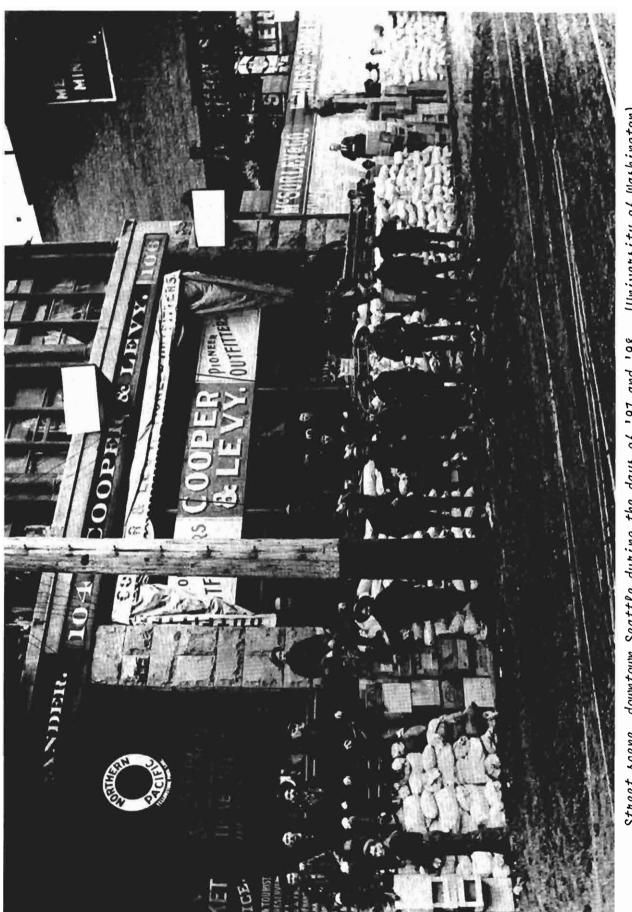
On August 14, 1896, Skookum Jim, Tagish Charley, and George Carmack made one of the largest placer gold strikes in history on a small tributary of the Klondike River in the Yukon Territory. In the next few months, many of the estimated 1,700 white men in the Yukon basin, of which 1,000 were in Alaska, 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





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

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 Copper River Kenai Peninsula Kuskokwim River Seward 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. 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 grayel 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.

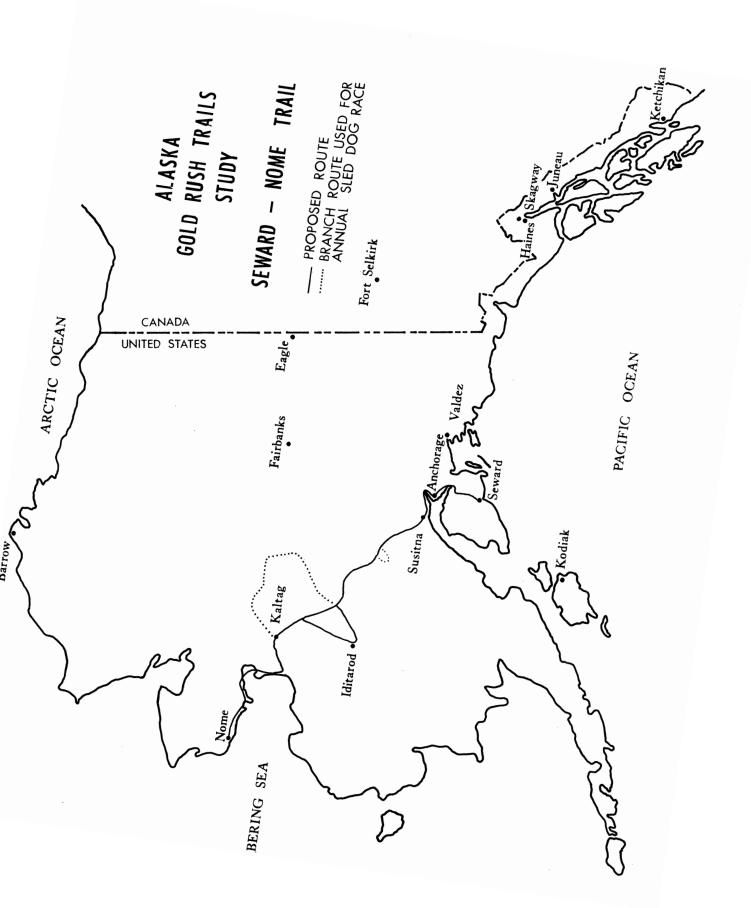
The Alaska-Yukon gold rush was of more importance than just the numbers of people involved and the amount of gold produced. Like the California Rush of 1849, the stampede to Alaska and the Yukon formed a chapter of the Nation's history and the cultural heritage of the hundreds of thousands of persons 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. 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)



#### 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.

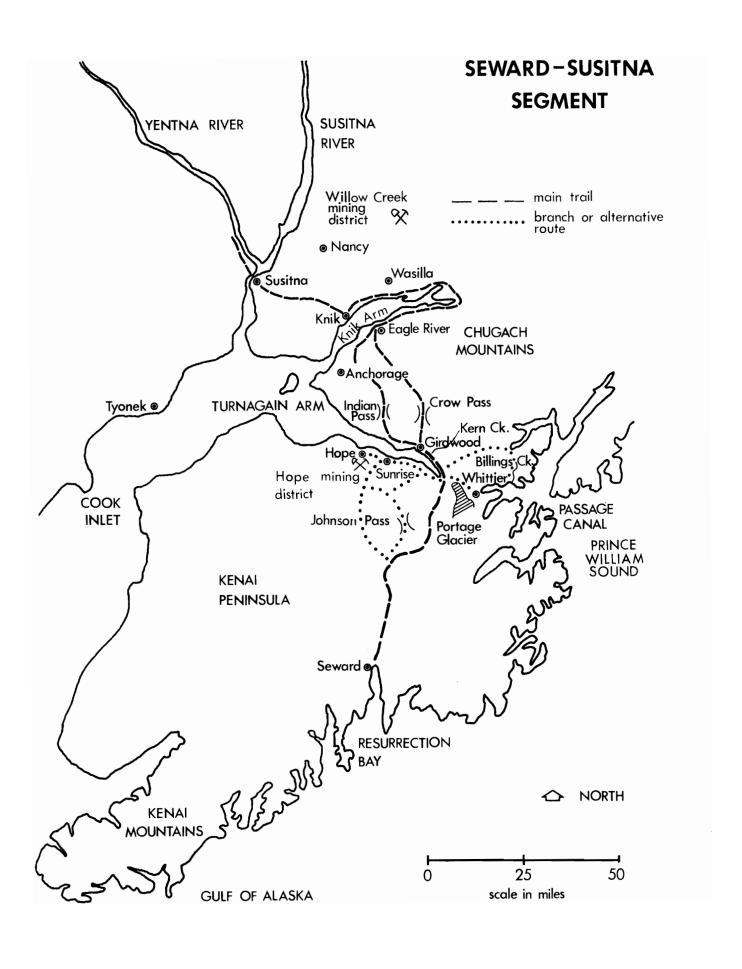
#### Seward-Susitna

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



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.

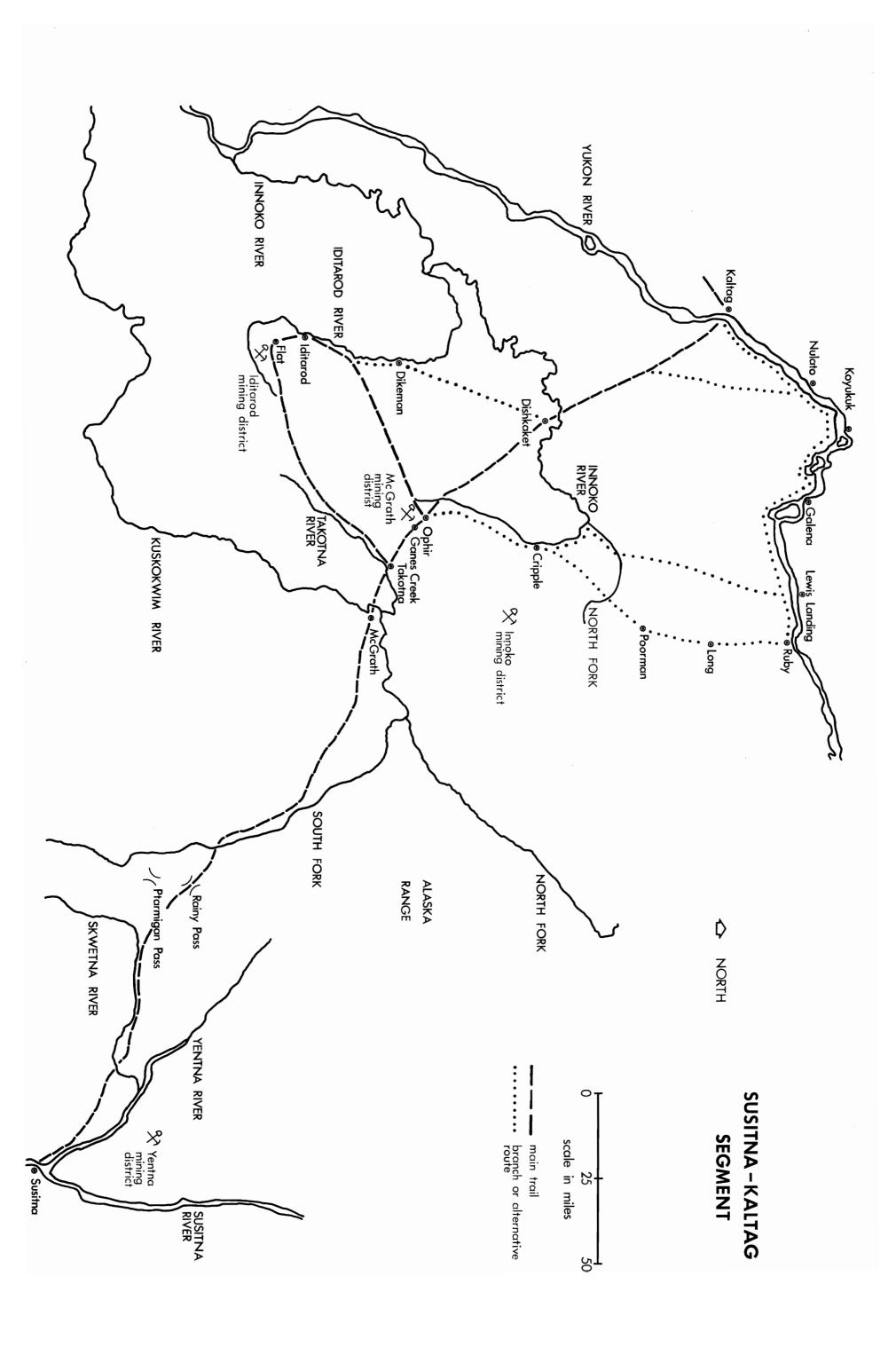
During the winter of 1907-08, men and supplies were transported overland from Kaltag and Lewis Landing by dog team to the town of Moore City on Ganes Creek. A strike on nearby Ophir Creek in early 1908, left Moore City deserted, and the new town of Ophir sprang up.

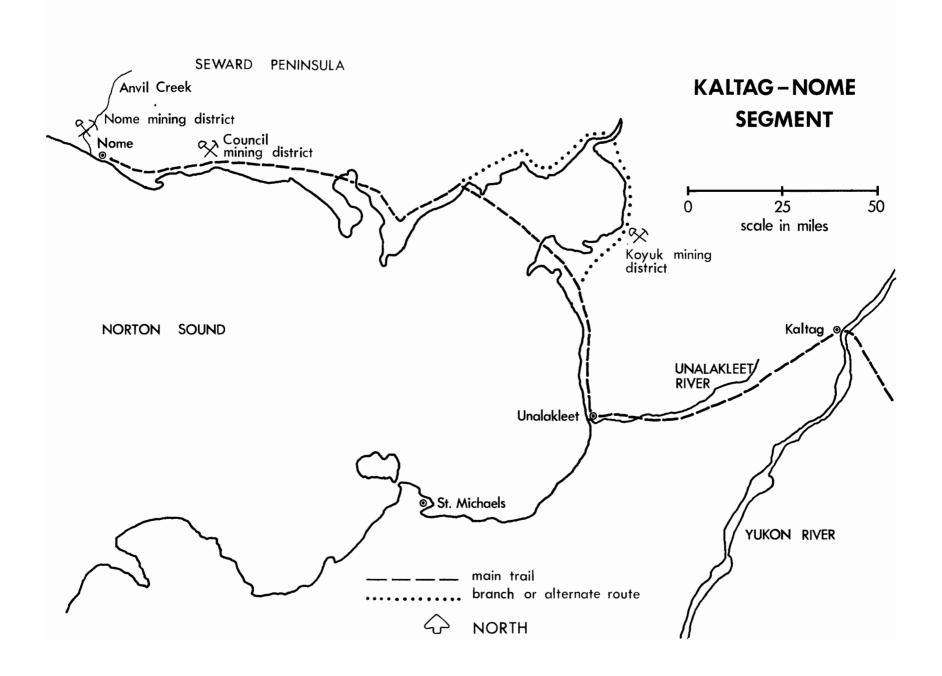
In 1908, W. L. Goodwin of the Alaska Road Commission surveyed a new trail from Seward to Nome. This trail was to provide more direct winter transportation to Nome and at the same time provide overland access to the new strikes in the Innoko district. Goodwin completed his survey utilizing existing routes 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.





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

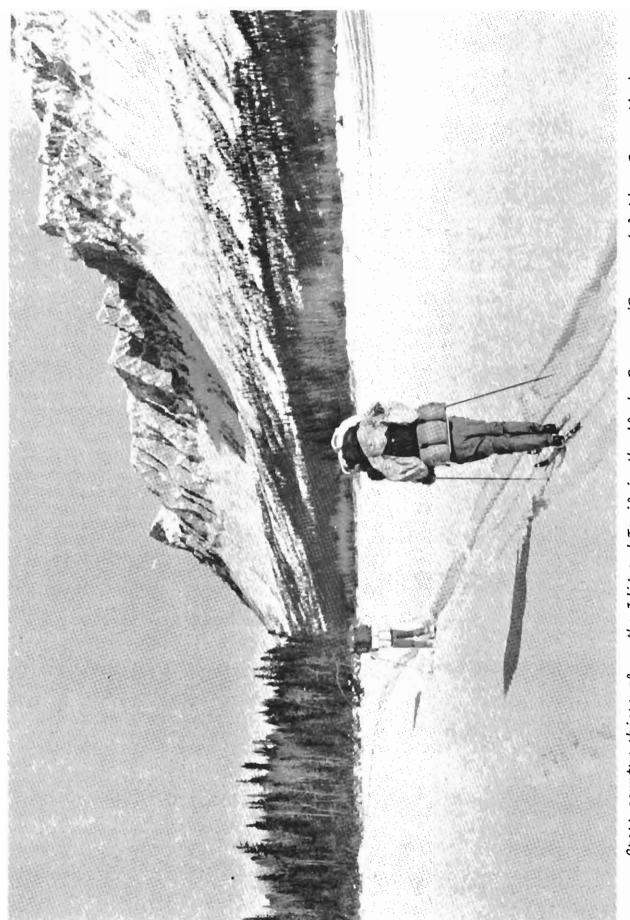
#### General Alignment

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.



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

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)

	Main Route	
SEGMENT	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 owner- ship by State
Farewell - McGrath*	80	Approx. 65 mi. proposed for in- clusion in Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest; 15 mi. withdrawn for selection by Native corpora- tions
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

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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 high- way; 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 (via Portage Lake) (via Twentymile)	17 25	10 mi. Chugach National Forest 7 mi. overlain by State highway 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 Airfie		State patented land
<pre>Ganes Creek - Flat (summer trail)</pre>	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	

<sup>\*</sup>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  $-100^{\rm o}$ F and colder. Extended periods of  $-40^{\rm o}$ F to  $-60^{\rm o}$ 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
<u>Federal</u>		
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	<u>75</u>	_4
Subtotal	393	20
State	$1,279.5 \frac{1}{}$	63
Local Governments	26	1
Native Corporations	$336 \frac{2}{}$	16
Other Private	2.5	<u>+</u>
	2 227	
TOTAL	2,037	100

 $<sup>\</sup>frac{1}{2}$  Includes existing roads and highways and the Yukon riverbed.

<sup>2/</sup> 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 <u>Iditarod Trail Annual</u> by Dorothy Page, photo provided by Lillian Carmichael.



Historic Roadhouse along the trail on Seward Peninsula. Photo from  $\underline{\text{Iditarod Trail Annual}}$  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.

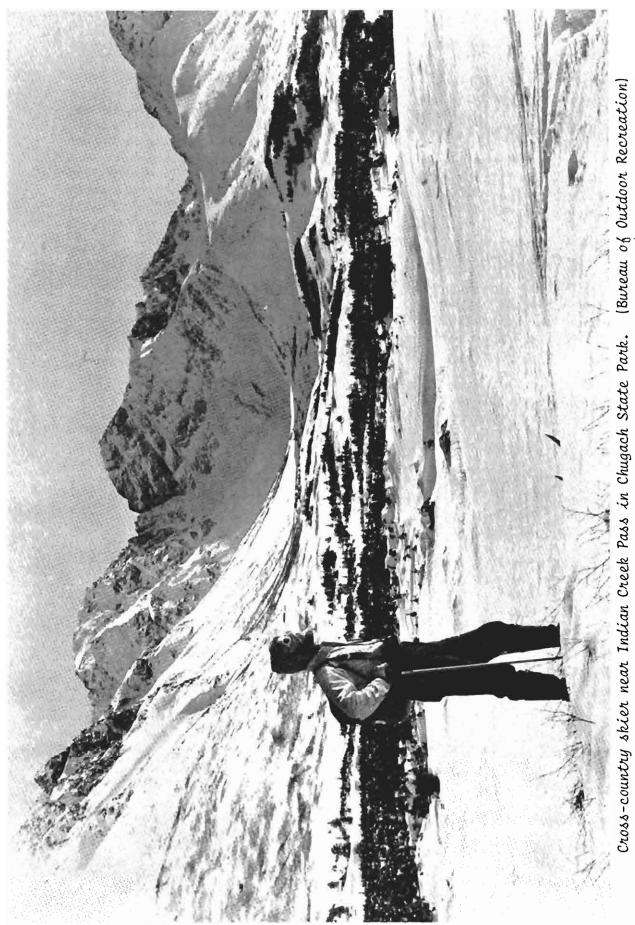
Other segments, although not publicly maintained, continue, through use, to be passable winter trails. These include segments in the McGrath-Takotna area, between villages along Norton Sound, between Kaltag and Unalakleet, and between Knik and Susitna. In the past several years, the State Department 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.



# 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,



Johnson Pass Trail in Chugach National Forest.

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.

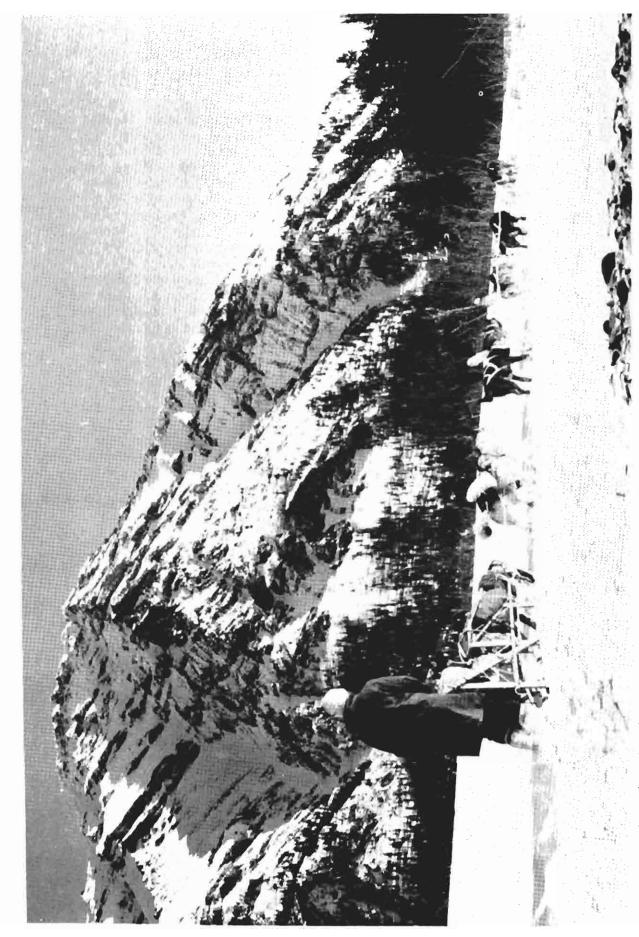
Each March since 1973, approximately 40 mushers and 400 dogs traverse major portions of the Iditarod Trail as part of the Anchorage to Nome sled dog race, although only about half the entrants reach Nome. The sled dog race follows the route closely except between Ophir and Kaltag and through the Alaska 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:

<u>Criterion</u>: 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.

<u>Criterion</u>: 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.

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

<u>Finding:</u> 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.

<u>Criterion</u>: 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.

<u>Finding:</u> 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.

<u>finding</u>: 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.

<u>Criterion</u>: 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.

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

<u>Criterion:</u> 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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