

Appendix A

Lauren Huffman's report on his inspection of structures along the Iditarod Trail around McGrath, Alaska and vicinity.

Historic Resource Study

Iditarod Trail, McGrath, Alaska, and Vicinity

In response to recommendations made by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, the Bureau of Land Management has initiated a study of the Iditarod Trail. In response to a request from the BLM, I was privileged to assist as sections of the Iditarod Trail between Iditarod and Rainy Pass were inspected from the air for remaining evidence of the trail and the roadhouses which once were stationed along it. Numerous cabin foundations were spotted from the air, and, where remains appeared more substantial, landings were attempted.

On the first day, the old McGrath townsite across the Kuskokwim River from the present settlement was visited. The area is very overgrown, and it appeared that most of the cabins and sheds which remain date from the 1920's or later. The town apparently migrated across the river to its present site when the Northern Commercial Company store was located on the opposite side of the river from the town; the date when the Northern Commercial Company complex was constructed as well as title records and eyewitness accounts concerning the remaining structures

could be obtained through investigation. No structure which resembled the McGrath roadhouse was discovered, and John Beck, the BLM archeologist, felt that a shift in the river may have destroyed it. Most of the structures visited are rapidly sinking into the earth; this condition was typical of many of the cabins along the trail where inspections were made. As the earth surrounding the base logs has kept them moist and allowed decay to progress, there is little strength left in these logs and routine jacking of the structures to their original elevations appears to be impractical. Jacking up the sound portions of log walls remaining above ground and adding infill timbers to restore the structures to their original exterior appearance would be possible in a few instances, but most of the structures have had their decay accelerated by their earth-covered roofs and are beyond any significant repairs short of reconstruction.

Also at McGrath are the remains of several river steamers, steamer cabins, and assorted miscellaneous river boat parts. Some of these relics have been collapsed by snow, etc., and are beyond economical stabilization even as ruins.

On the second, third, and fourth days, sections of the trail outside of the town of McGrath were overflowed. Landings were attempted where significant remains of cabins were spotted, and the townsites of Iditarod and Tolstoi were given brief percursory inspections.

Iditarod is in a much better than average state of preservation; sidewalks have collapsed, but numerous structures remain standing, and the

stripping of their contents has not been completed. The structures are claimed by various individuals, but, to some extent, the historic remains are being exploited and exported by these persons; the town's main protection is its remoteness. A trapper living in the vicinity keeps an eye on the townsite. Skeletons of several river boats were also observed in the Iditarod vicinity.

The town of Tolstoi has only one building left standing which may be from its historic period. Several collapsed structures and foundations remain visible; a cabin is adjacent to the townsite and its occupant appears to be utilizing the structural remains of the town for firewood.

Several trail structures were also inspected. Little in the way of historical research appears to have been done on these cabins, and it was difficult to determine which ones dated from the historic period. The archeologist seemed to feel that the surviving structures inspected were probably too small to be the early roadhouses; this is probably true at least for the most traveled portions of the trail. Likewise, most of these structures were not the proper dimensions to be the Alaska Road Commission cabins, which were reputedly built to a standardized plan. Where the trail is to remain opened and actively used, these cabins would make economical and convenient trail shelters. Where there are no plans to utilize or maintain the historic trail, there seems to be little point in expending resources trying to restore and maintain these decaying structures before records are analyzed to determine whether they date from the historic era.

Before an intelligent and coordinated plan of preservation and restoration can begin, a thorough in depth analysis of the trail needs to be undertaken. The principal investigator should be a historian given the time and means to explore all promising leads for information concerning the trail and its structures. This research project would be equivalent to the Historic Resource Studies produced by the National Park Service (see item no. 1). This document contains all pertinent information discovered relating to its topic and is an important reference tool for the historical architect and other subsequent investigators. It is the initial step in grasping the scope of the resource and zeroing in on those resources most worthy of serious preservation efforts. Armed with this data, the architect can then begin to determine which structures are worthy of preservation and restoration and begin to assign priorities.

Such a document would be extremely useful to the Iditarod Trail study; an in depth study of the entire resource should be performed so that a consistent plan for administration of the trail areas can be developed before the final land selections are made. The Bureau of Land Management should initiate this study because nearly a thousand miles of the trail are currently under its jurisdiction; this study would be invaluable for its successors in selected areas and would lay the groundwork for the BLM to move ahead with management and preservation projects as soon as the selections are completed, while avoiding the wasting of scarce funds on extensive restoration projects in areas which might be selected by other governmental agencies; it is possible that fewer than 100 miles of trail will remain under BLM management in the future.

Concurrently with the Historic Resource Studies, a title survey apparently needs to be undertaken and the title questions on many of the sites and structures resolved so that restoration and preservation funds are not expended on townsites and buildings which are owned by others, and in order that work can be ready to proceed on areas to be retained by the BLM.

In the case of outstanding resources such as those at Iditarod, the BLM may desire to undertake the legal work required to invalidate the private claims and assume full responsibility for the protection of the resource, or it may prefer to lease the land on which the structures rest to the claimants, while requiring a certain level of performance on their part.

Many of the historic resources of the Iditarod Trail are in the realm of the historical archeologist and are very fragile in nature. Even the footsteps of our inspection party caused damage in some areas, and the trampling of masses could render their information valueless. At the townsites, if the BLM intends to preserve them, an active onsite presence will have to be maintained. Perhaps fencing of some of the more easily damaged foundations and river boats, etc., would then be a practical protection alternative. In the backcountry, isolation and anonymity are probably the best protection currently available, but it must be remembered that a Historic Resource Study will pinpoint each of these sites for bottle hunters and antique collectors. Posting warning sign will not deter everyone from raiding such sites; and unfortunately, no better protection methods short of onsite presence are known at the present time.

Specific recommendations can be made in some instances. The Halfway Cabin, for instance, built in 1939, can be preserved if given some attention in the next few years. Should funds be spent on this non-historic structure if no effort is made to keep the trail opened in this area? On this cabin, the base logs are in the ground, are saturated, and are rotten. The cabin should be jacked back out of the ground and the base logs replaced. At present there is no easy solution for this sinking problem, and periodic replacement of the base logs appears to be the most practical alternative. The eave overhangs are rotten and/or missing on the cabin, and the roof is also disintegrating rapidly. This structure must be replaced soon so that the roof and eaves will continue to protect the cabin walls.

The homestead complex at the Rohn River with its picturesque setting seems to be worthy of a stabilization effort on aesthetic grounds. Once again, a valuable first step would be a historical research project to determine the structures' age, history, and if they have historical significance. Considering its location, condition, and probable lack of historical association with the trail, perhaps stabilization in its present condition in order to prolong its life is all that should be considered. The outbuildings in this complex have already collapsed, and the roof structure in the cabin appears to be of adequate strength so no additional bracing is necessary at this point in time. Initial stabilization steps, which might be carried out in the field by inexperienced personnel, could include the periodic spraying of the collapsed structures and remaining roofs with a herbicide selected by your archeologist and a later application of a 5 to 15% pentachlorophenol

solution in a mineral spirit vehicle to all wood surfaces. Both applications should be carefully controlled to minimize overspray. On the standing structures, a subsequent treatment of Hydrozo Clear or Hydrozo Clear Light (depending on climate) could also be utilized to minimize the need for repeated applications of the pentachlorophenol and to reduce the effects of weathering.

Another interesting topic for a Historic Resource Study would be an investigation of the history of the river boats such as the Tana, the Lavelle Young, and other vessels whose remains can be seen at McGrath, Iditarod, and other places along the trail. If any boats remain relatively intact, a HAER survey is strongly recommended and should be given a very high priority. Towns such as Iditarod should have HABS photographic recording project performed before release if the BLM decides to honor the claims by private individuals to the buildings.

Item I

Historic Resource Study

The Historic Resource Study is the means of presenting professional identification, evaluation, and recommendations concerning the historic resources of a proposed or existing area of the National Park System. The Historic Resource Study may be programed to obtain historical, architectural, or archeological data for alternatives studies, for master plans, and for professional assistance in compilation of a park List of Classified Structures.

A Historic Resource Study will be considered satisfactory when:

1. It includes such of the subsequent elements as may be applicable to the particular need:
 - a. Enlargement upon the landmark study prepared for the designation of national significance.
 - b. Historical background and significance for areas not previously studied.
 - c. A documented map recording and locating all existing archeological, historical, and cultural ruins, structures, features, sites, and objects within the study area.

- d. A historical base map or maps recording historic sites, features, and ground cover existing at all periods of historical or cultural significance accompanied by documentation of the source of data shown.
- e. National Register inventory forms covering districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects of national, State, or local significance in history, archeology, architecture, and culture as judged against National Register criteria. (These forms constitute the professional recommendations on which lands and resources should be designated Class VI in the Land Classification Plan.)
- f. A Recommended List of Classified Structures identifying which structures are worthy of preservation. (See Part III.)
- g. Evaluation of historic resources, including values not represented by tangible surviving sites or remains.
- h. Identification of problems in preservation or interpretation.
- i. Broad recommendations for preservation and interpretation.

For parks with historic resources that are predominantly archeological in character, the Historic Resource Study will be considered satisfactory when:

1. It includes all or any combination of the following elements as required by the particular need to be met:
 - a. Archeological and aboriginal background and significance for areas not previously studied.
 - b. A documented archeological base map recording and locating all existing archeological and aboriginal structures, features, sites, and objects within the study area.
 - c. A documented interpretive narrative of the known archeological and aboriginal structures, features, sites, and objects within the study area.
 - d. A record of the ecological factors involved at the time of the principal archeological or aboriginal cultural significance accompanied by documentation of the source of data shown.
 - e. Minor test excavations to determine stratigraphy and depth of otherwise superimposed structures, sites, and features.
 - f. Enlargement upon the landmark study prepared for the designation of national significance.
 - g. National Register inventory forms covering districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects of national, State, or local significance in archeology and aboriginal culture as judged

against National Register criteria. These forms constitute the professional recommendations on which lands and resources should be designated Class VI in the Land Classification Plan.

- h. A recommended List of Classified Structures identifying which structures are worthy of preservation.
- i. Evaluation of prehistoric resources, including values not represented by tangible surviving sites or remains (remote sensing, aerial photos, Indian legends).
- j. Identification of problems in preservation or interpretation.
- k. Broad recommendations for preservation and interpretation.