

**SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF THE IDITAROD TRAIL
AND CONNECTING TRAILS IN THE CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST**

DRAFT TECHNICAL REPORT

VOLUME 2: NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION FORMS

Prepared for
**USDA Forest Service
Chugach National Forest
Anchorage, Alaska**

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PHASE I EVALUATION FORM

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March, 1991

1. Name of Property: Canyon Creek Trail
2. Location: Sections 15, 21, 22, 28, 29, T8N-R1W, Seward Meridian. Seward C-7 Quadrangle.
3. Classification:
 - Ownership: Public-federal
 - Category of Property: Structure
 - Number of Resources within Property:
 - Contributing: 1
 - Non-Contributing: 0
 - Number of Contributing Resources previously listed: 0
 - Name of related multiple property listing: The Iditarod Trail, Connecting Trails, and Associated Properties Within the Chugach National Forest, Alaska. Gold Mining on the Chugach National Forest, 1895-1940.
6. Function or Use:
 - Historic Functions: Transportation/pedestrian-related
Transportation/road-related
 - Current Functions: Transportation/road-related
7. Description:

The Canyon Creek Trail ascended from the mouth of Canyon Creek to near Summit Lake, and by extension this trail continued to Kenai Lake and to Seward by way of Moose Pass and the Alaska Central Railroad. The trail segment considered here is from the mouth of Canyon Creek southwestward along the east side of Canyon Creek to a former bridge crossing between Weber and Wilson Creeks. Southwestward from the latter location the Canyon Creek Trail was overlain by the Moose Pass to Sunrise Wagon Road built in 1912.

The identified trail departs from the old Johnson Pass Military Road and current Seward Highway in NW/SE/SE Section 15, T8N-R1W, at Point "A" on the attached topographic map. The trail is a very distinct wagon road 3 to 4 meters wide, with ruts up to 40cm deep. The downslope side of the road is curbed with logs in a number of locations where the road passes along steep slopes. The road had been cleared of brush and blow-downs prior to survey in July, 1990, and it had recently been used by unknown persons to reach mining claims adjacent to the creek gorge about a mile above the highway.

The road remains very distinct for about 2.5 miles, to Point "C" in NE/NE/SE Section 28, T8N-R1W, except at Point "B" where the road is obscured for about 130 meters by the clearing and cut made during installation of a large power line. At Point "C" the road trends to the east, around the south side of a small lake. A metal-lined trough, possibly part of a mining flume, was found beside the road near the lake. The road dissipates (ends?) at the southeastern extent of the lake, where a substantial ditch exits the lake and extends to the south. A vague foot trail extends south-southeast from Point "C," but it then dissipates into alder growth on the west-facing mountain slope above a round, man-made pond. The foot trail follows and in some areas appears to be within the old diversion ditch. In two localities the trail traverses smaller ditches.

The southern end of the identified trail is about 300 meters northeast of the ruins of the Wible Mining Camp, but trail segments connecting the identified trail to the camp were not found. Areas to the east and south of the Wible camp have been extensively disturbed either during construction of water diversion features or during mining of bench gravel deposits. Trail segments were not identified southward from Point "D." To the south of the Wible camp, the benches immediately above the creek gorge appear to have been mined, and the steep slopes above these benches are densely overgrown with alders and other brush. One line of alder growth on the mountain slope to the southeast of the Wible camp represents a ditch which brought water from Moose Creek and Roaring Creek to Wible's storage ponds.

The general location of the ca. 1910 bridge across Canyon Creek, in Section 9, T7N-R1W (Sleem 1910), was examined on the west side of the creek, but remains of the bridge or trail segments were not identified. Sleem's 1910 map may be in some degree of error about this location; the gorge is quite steep in central Section 9, which would seem to have made access to the bridge difficult in this locality.

The Canyon Creek Trail retains essential integrity of location, design, construction, materials, association, and feeling from the Seward Highway (Point "A") southward to the apparent termination of wagon road development (Point "C"). The road appears to have not been disturbed or degraded from the period of significance, except for a distance of about 130 linear meters where construction of a power line has destroyed

both the trail ruts and the setting of the trail/wagon road.

8. Statement of Significance:

Significance Level: Local/State

Applicable Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: Transportation, Communications

Period of Significance: 1895-1912

Significant Dates:

Significant Person:

Architect/Builder:

State significance of property:

The Canyon Creek Trail was used by miners to travel between prospects and mines on Canyon Creek and Sunrise City. Gold was discovered on Canyon Creek in 1895, and by 1898 a pack trail had been established from the mouth of Canyon Creek to Mills Creek. This trail was reported to have been extended southward to Summit Lake in the summer of 1898 (Mendenhall 1898:277). This trail was apparently very rough (Learned 1900:133). At least as early as 1897, a roadhouse was operated at "The Forks," at the confluence of Canyon Creek and East Fork Creek, to serve the substantial traffic on the Canyon Creek and East Fork/Lynx Creek trails (Morgan n.d.:17).

By 1910 the Canyon Creek Trail led from "The Forks" up the west side of the creek to a bridge crossing Canyon Creek between the mouths of Weber and Wilson creeks. According to one source (Buzzell and McMahan 1986:18-19), trails existed on both the east and west sides of Canyon Creek above this bridge. At least one trail also apparently was established on the west side of lower Canyon Creek to provide access to gold lode claims.

Expansion of the gold mining on Canyon Creek resulted in a need for roads on which to transport heavy mining equipment, and miners and merchants succeeded in building a wagon road between Hope and Sunrise City. Despite the rich gold placers on Canyon Creek, the route up the drainage remained only a trail, apparently because of the difficult terrain. Supplies and equipment for the mining operations normally were shipped by water to Hope or Sunrise during summer months, and then were sledged to the mines during the following winter. The Alaska Central Railroad built its line from Seward northward beginning in 1902, and by 1906 some equipment and supplies were hauled by railroad to Mile 29 on Trail Lake, and were then hauled by sled over Moose Pass and up Quartz and Summit creeks

to the upper end of Canyon Creek (Seward Weekly Gateway 6/10/1906).

In 1907-08 the Alaska Road Commission constructed the Johnson Pass Military Road from Mile 34 of the Alaska Central Railroad, over Johnson Pass and down the old East Fork/Lynx Creek trail to Sunrise. The Canyon Creek trails met the new wagon road near The Forks, and the wagon road provided a means for moving equipment and supplies nearly year-round and at much lower cost. In 1909 the Alaska Road Commission constructed a sled road from Mile 29 on the Alaska Central Railroad over Moose Pass to near Summit Lake at the head of Canyon Creek. By 1910 residents in the Moose Pass area were clamoring for the extension of the Moose Pass Military Road down Canyon Creek to the Johnson Pass Military Road (Seward Weekly Gateway 7/9/1910). When the road was extended in 1912, it was built down the west side of Canyon Creek (Alaska Road Commission 1912:16). The Moose Pass to Sunrise road was slowly upgraded to wagon road status; by 1921 the entire 39 miles of road were considered to be usable for summer wagon travel (Alaska Road Commission 1921:32).

Regular winter mail service was established between Seward, Sunrise, and Hope in 1902 (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 1977:23-25). The carriers apparently regularly used the Canyon Creek route, even after the Johnson Pass Military Road was constructed, because the former route offered more shelter during periods of bad weather (Mineral Resources of Alaska 1911:137). The mail route passed Wible's camp enroute from The Forks to Mills Creek and Moose Pass (Seward Weekly Gateway 3/2/1907; 4/10/1909). The trail on the west side of Canyon Creek was probably used by the mail carriers after 1912.

The recorded road led to Sam Wible's extensive placer mining operation on Canyon Creek, and Wible is reported to have constructed both trails and ditches as part of his operation (Buzzell and McMahan 1986:16). Wible began buying and working claims in at least three locations on Canyon Creek in 1898, and he also had interests on Falls Creek and on Crow Creek (Seward Weekly Gateway 4/14/1906). Wible was an experienced mining engineer with substantial financial resources, and he installed the first large-scale mining equipment on Canyon Creek. By 1906 he had installed a ditch system more than four miles long and had by far the most important mining operation on Canyon Creek (Paige and Knopf 1907:122; Buzzell and McMahan 1986:16). Wible hauled a huge "Pelton Wheel" weighing 900 pounds

to his mine with mules; this water-driven apparatus supplied mechanical power for moving boulders. Wible is reported to have sold his property in 1910, but representatives of his estate operated the mine at least as late as 1913 (Seward Weekly Gateway 11/12/1910; Seward Daily Gateway 9/29/1913). Tom Allison and others continued operating the Wible mine for several years (Barry 1973:101).

Wible's operation on Canyon Creek was supplied from Sunrise until at least 1906, and the large equipment used in the operation to that date must have been transported up the Canyon Creek Trail (Seward Weekly Gateway 7/7/1906). A knowledgeable local informant stated that Wible widened the existing trail to allow heavy equipment to be hauled from Turnagain Arm at Sunrise (Buzzell and McMahan 1986:35). The date of improvement of the trail to wagon traffic capability and the degree of continuity with the ca. 1895-1898 trail are unknown (Buzzell and McMahan 1986:35). One source (Martin 1915) indicates this route remained a trail in 1915, but Martin may not have had first-hand knowledge of the route below Wible's camp.

The Canyon Creek Trail is individually eligible for nomination to the National Register under Criterion A, because it represents a broad pattern important in history, the gold rush and post-rush placer mining development of Canyon Creek and the Kenai Peninsula in the period 1895 to 1945. The trail served as an artery of travel from Turnagain Arm to the mining camps on Canyon and Mills creeks, and it served as a communication route between the mining towns of Sunrise and Hope on the Turnagain Arm and the port of Seward. Mail was carried over this trail by dogsled between 1902 and 1912.

The Canyon Creek Trail is also eligible under Criteria A and C as an element of the "Iditarod Trail, Connecting Trails, and Associated Properties Within the Chugach National Forest" multiple properties group, which represents communications and transportation themes of the ca. 1895 to 1925 period in Alaska. Location of the road relative to topography, improvements in the form of cuts and grade fills, and the log curbing physically represent wagon roads of the 1895-1925 period.

9. Major Bibliographic References:

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- 1915 Geology and Mineral Resources of the Kenai Peninsula. U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 587. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

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- 1910 Map of Kenai Mining District and Moose Pass Regions, Kenai Precinct, Alaska. Rand, McNally & Co., Engravers, Chicago.

[illegible]

CANYON CREEK TRAIL



Road at North End, Near Seward Highway, View to South



Road to South of Powerline Disturbance, View to South