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(March 1992)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES MULTIPLE PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION FORM

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

X New Submission _____ Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic Properties Associated with the Valdez Trail, 1898-1943.

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Transportation along the Valdez Trail, 1898-1943.

C. Form Prepared by

name/title Geoffrey T. Bleakley, Historian

organization Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve date 09/25/1996

street & number P.O. Box 439 telephone (907) 822-5234

city or town Copper Center state AK zip code 99573

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Judith Bittner AKSHPO — Nov 19, 1997
Signature and title of certifying official — Date

Jonathan Jarvis NPS-WRST — Jim Stevenson 1.15.98
State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register

Edson H. Beall — 2/12/98
Signature of the Keeper — Date

for

Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 120 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

E. Statement of Historic Context

Introduction

The two primary branches of the 700-mile-long Valdez Trail provided the first overland access from the coast to much of interior Alaska. Although originally directed to Eagle City, located on the upper Yukon River, the trail was diverted to Fairbanks following a nearby gold discovery in 1902. A closing thrust in a period of pioneer American trail building, the Valdez Trail channelled people, freight, and mail into the region, promoting mining activity, aiding the development of supporting industries, and hastening the settlement of the Copper, Yukon, and Tanana River valleys.

This context focuses on the development of transportation within the trail corridor, deemed for the purpose of this study to be fifty feet in width. Beginning in 1898, with the U.S. Army's initial exploration, it concludes in 1943, by which time war-related military improvements had substantially altered the majority of the route.

Much of the Valdez Trail now lies buried beneath its major successors, the Richardson and Glenn Highways. Nevertheless, some important pieces remain. The section between the Tanana and the Fortymile Rivers, for example, was largely abandoned following the Fairbanks gold discovery in 1902, and therefore exemplifies the earliest period of trail construction. Other sections, like the one through Keystone Canyon, located just north of Valdez, were bypassed much later, and represent subsequent building epochs.

The condition and integrity of such surviving portions varies widely. Local people maintained many abandoned pieces, utilizing them for subsistence activities. Where this has occurred, such as on the Copper Bluff segment south of Glennallen, the route maintains much of its historic appearance as an eight- to twelve-foot-wide, earthen road.

Where not maintained, abandoned sections were quickly colonized by pioneering species like willow and alder. Although now often completely overgrown, these remain easily identifiable by their characteristic vegetation.

American Exploration of the Trail Corridor

When the United States acquired Alaska from Russia in 1867, neither party knew much about the territory's eastern interior. Russians had focused their attention on coastal areas and had only made a few abbreviated attempts to explore the region. Americans, in contrast, had never visited the area at all.

Neglected for the next fifteen years, the district began attracting interest in the mid-1880s. Gold strikes in northern British Columbia's Cassiar region and near the present site of Juneau

lured prospectors to the north. Many eventually entered the interior, most by way of the Yukon River, but some via Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound.[1]

The American government worried about the potential for conflict between the undisciplined miners and Alaska's Native population. Consequently, the U.S. Army soon dispatched several expeditions to reconnoiter the region. One such party, led by Lt. William R. Abercrombie, attempted to examine the Copper River basin in 1884. Although stopped by rapids on the lower river, Abercrombie later located an alternative overland route to the interior: across the Valdez Glacier heading the Valdez Arm.[2]

Northern gold discoveries continued, climaxing with an especially rich find on the Yukon Territory's Klondike River in 1896. This precipitated the region's greatest rush. In their haste to reach the gold fields, many stampeders prepared inadequately for the hardships they would have to endure. As a result, the U.S. Army soon received reports of widespread deprivation. Responding to the rumors, the military dispatched Capt. Patrick H. Ray and Lt. Wilds P. Richardson to proceed to Alaska and to provide necessary relief.[3]

Most stampeders reached the Klondike via a largely Canadian path over the Chilkoot Pass, located near the end of southeast Alaska's Lynn Canal. Many, however, objected to the foreign control of that transportation corridor and called for an "all-American route" to the Yukon River. Ray acceded to their demands, recommending the immediate construction of a government trail leading from either Prince William Sound or Cook Inlet into the Yukon Basin.[4]

Unscrupulous local promoters, circulating stories of an easy passage linking Prince William Sound with interior Alaska, lured thousands of gullible stampeders to Port Valdez. Unfortunately, the arriving prospectors found only one way across the Chugach Mountains: Abercrombie's difficult path over the Valdez and Klutina Glaciers. Faced with few options,

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[1] Alfred H. Brooks, *Blazing Alaska's Trails* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1973), 299-334; William R. Hunt, *North of 53°: The Wild Days of the Alaska-Yukon Mining Frontier, 1870-1914* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), 8-13.

[2] Morgan B. Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska, 1865-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 98-105; Lt. William R. Abercrombie, "Report of a Supplementary Expedition into the Copper River Valley, 1884," in U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska* (Washington: GPO, 1900), 389-92.

[3] Capt. Patrick H. Ray, "Relief of the Destitute in the Gold Fields, 1897," in U.S. Congress, *Compilation of Narratives*, 497.

[4] Ibid, 503.

over 3,000 attempted that route, and many eventually died from accidents, scurvy, and exposure.[5]

In the spring of 1898 the army sent Capt. William R. Abercrombie back to Port Valdez, hoping to locate a safer trail into interior Alaska. The captain first inspected the Lowe River valley, where he spotted the remains of a Sugpiaq Eskimo path leading to the north toward Keystone Canyon. Proceeding to the interior via the Valdez Glacier, Abercrombie found an Ahtna route leading up the right (or western) bank of the Copper River. Both were eventually utilized by the Valdez Trail.[6]

Construction of the Valdez Trail

Abercrombie returned to the region in 1899. Utilizing only hand tools, his soldiers built a ninety-three-mile packhorse trail from the coastal community of Valdez to the Tonsina River. Construction continued, and by 1901 the army had completed its path all the way to Eagle City.[7]

Alaska residents soon demanded additional federal aid. In 1903 visiting members of a Senate Subcommittee on Territories heard testimony on a broad range of subjects, including the need for better transportation. Pioneer Judge James Wickersham, for example, requested that the government improve local roads, calling such action an essential prerequisite to developing the interior's mining potential.[8]

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[5] Frank C. Schrader, "A Reconnaissance of a Part of Prince William Sound and the Copper River District, Alaska, in 1898," in United States Geological Survey, *Twentieth Annual Report of the Survey, 1898-1899. Part VII--Explorations in Alaska in 1898* (Washington: GPO, 1900), 350-59; Jim and Nancy Lethcoe suggest that 51 individuals perished along the route between April 1898 and April 1899. Jim and Nancy Lethcoe, *Valdez Gold Rush Trails of 1898-99* (Valdez, Alaska: Prince William Sound Books, 1996), 39, 94.

[6] General Orders, March 16, 1898, reproduced in Capt. Edwin F. Glenn and Capt. William R. Abercrombie, *Report of Explorations in the Territory of Alaska* (Washington: GPO, 1899), 5-6; Kaj Birket-Smith and Frederoca de Laguna, *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska* (Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1938), 150; Capt. William R. Abercrombie, "A Military Reconnaissance of the Copper River Valley, 1898," in U.S. Congress, *Compilation of Narratives*, 571-72, 587.

[7] Lt. Walter C. Babcock, "Report of First Lieutenant Walter C. Babcock, Eighth U.S. Cavalry, from April 26, 1899, to October 9, 1899," in William R. Abercrombie, *Alaska, 1899. Copper River Exploring Expedition* (Washington: GPO, 1900), 58-77; Addison M. Powell, *Trailing and Camping in Alaska* (New York: Wessells and Bissel, 1910), 280.

[8] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Territories, *Conditions in Alaska: Hearings before Subcommittee on Territories Appointed to Investigate Conditions in Alaska*, Senate Report 282, 58th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: GPO, 1904), 9, 54-64, 118-124.

United States Geological Survey geologist Alfred H. Brooks apparently agreed. Incidental to a discussion on the future of placer mining, he recommended that a million dollars be spent in building wagon roads to the inland placer camps. Such arguments seem to have convinced the senators. Upon returning to Washington, they recommended that the government construct a system of transportation routes, beginning with a wagon road connecting Valdez and Eagle City.[9]

That winter Congress appropriated $25,000 to conduct the initial survey. The following spring the War Department appointed an army engineer to supervise the work. Completing the job in August 1904, J. M. Clapp estimated that it would cost $3,500 per mile or a total of approximately $1.5 million to build the road.[10]

Eagle City, however, had by then lost its priority as the trail's terminus. Mineral production on the upper Yukon River had begun to decline, and prospector Felix Pedro had discovered gold in the Tanana Valley. Stampeders heading for this new strike left the trail near the Gakona River and followed that stream to its headwaters, where they crossed the Alaska Range and proceeded down the Delta River. Upon reaching the Delta's mouth, they followed the Tanana River northwest to Fairbanks. By the end of 1904 this Fairbanks branch had become the dominant interior route.[11]

With mining activity increasing, federal authorities soon accelerated their efforts to improve transportation in Alaska. In January 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt established the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska (popularly known as the Alaska Road Commission or ARC) and designated Maj. Wilds P. Richardson as its first president. Richardson was particularly concerned about the development of interior Alaska and emphasized the speedy construction of a more permanent Valdez-Fairbanks route.[12]

The ARC's initial construction efforts met only basic demands. The trail's width was determined by its anticipated traffic. Light traffic required a ten-foot roadway, while heavy traffic demanded sixteen feet. Over most level, well-drained ground, road crews merely

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[9] Alfred H. Brooks, "Placer Mining in Alaska in 1903," in S. F. Emmons and C. W. Hayes, *Contributions to Economic Geology, 1903*, USGS Bulletin No. 225 (Washington: GPO, 1904), 56-57; Jeannette P. Nichols, *Alaska: A History of Its Administration, Exploration, and Industrial Development During Its First Half Century Under the Rule of the United States* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1924), 224.

[10] U.S. Congress, House, *Preliminary Reports, with Estimates, for Wagon Road from Valdez to Fort Egbert, Alaska, and for a Military Trail between the Yukon River and Coldfoot, Alaska*, House Document No. 192, 58th Cong., 3rd sess. (Washington: GPO: 1905), 1-3.

[11] "The Only Way to the Tanana Site," *Alaska Prospector* (Valdez), March 26, 1903; "Many People on the Trail," *Valdez News*, March 28, 1903; "Will be Much Travel," ibid, December 26, 1903; "Valdez Furnishes Best Route to Fairbanks," ibid, February 6, 1904; "The Valdez Route," ibid, September 24, 1904.

[12] Brooks, *Blazing Alaska's Trails*, 426.

cleared a corridor. Where it was possible to improve drainage, they sometimes removed the moss, "grading up and crowning, with a single ditch on interior slope and frequent cross culverts to carry off seepage and rainfall and prevent cutting." In permafrost areas, where good drainage was impossible, crews utilized corduroy construction. Designed to prevent the frozen ground from melting and creating an impassable quagmire, this technique involved placing a layer of poles parallel to the roadbed and covering them with another layer at right angles to the first.[13]

Culvert construction varied. Where the needed water capacity was small, the Road Commission usually fabricated pipe culverts from four twelve-inch planks. For larger applications, the crews built culverts entirely of log, except in treeless sections where it sometimes utilized a dry masonry technique.[14]

Under normal conditions, the Road Commission would probably have limited itself to reconnaissance and survey work that first season and not undertaken any real construction. Receiving urgent appeals from the residents of Fairbanks, however, Richardson moved to provide immediate relief. Road crews rapidly replaced 3,032 feet of worn-out corduroy and bridged about twenty-five small streams.[15]

The ARC distributed and cached the materials necessary for its next construction season along the entire route during the winter of 1905-06. Besides arranging for the delivery of rations, animal forage, and tools, it also began the job of bridging the Tazlina River. Built by Lars Holland, this $19,000 structure replaced a hazardous ferry on which several passengers had been drowned.[16]

For interior Alaska, the bridge was a technological wonder. Four hundred and fifty feet long, it employed two Howe truss spans of 108 feet, two King post spans of fifty feet, and approaches. The main trusses rested on pile bents, protected by 10 x 30 foot, rock-filled crib piers. The trusses were constructed of hewn lumber, with the lower chords built from four to six pieces, bolted and keyed together. A lack of large timber near the site forced Holland to secure trees from as much as six miles away.[17]

Improving the trail was a difficult and expensive process. Engineers had to overcome many obstacles, including a short construction season, raging glacial rivers, permafrost, and an abundance of mountainous terrain. Crews relocated many of the original segments, including

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[13] Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska (hereafter cited ARC), *Annual Report, 1905*, 297-98, 308.

[14] ARC, *Annual Report, 1906*, 15.

[15] Ibid, 295, 299.

[16] "Road Commission: Materials Arrive for Tazlina Bridge," *Valdez News*, February 3, 1906.

[17] ARC, *Annual Report, 1906*, 21-22.

the one from Gakona to Isabel Pass. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1906 season, the Alaska Road Commission had finished the route.[18]

Maintenance and Use of the Valdez Trail

As the Road Commission grew more sophisticated, it eventually adopted fixed standards for its roads. A wagon road, for example, embraced "only that class of road intended to meet the conditions of an all-year-round traffic of considerable tonnage, located with suitable grades, crowned, ditched, and drained, and corduroyed or planked where necessary." A winter road, like that between Valdez and Fairbanks, was "designed to meet the requirements for winter travel only." While not crowned, ditched, or drained, such a road possessed suitable width for double teams and a proper grade for loads.[19]

Granted substantial annual funding, the Alaska Road Commission gradually upgraded the Valdez Trail. Originally created for pack and saddle horses, it quickly evolved into a winter road and by the end of 1908, about a third was suitable for wagons. Traffic increased as well. J. H. Ingram, the superintendent of the Valdez District, estimated that contractors had moved over 83,000 pounds of mail, 2,500 tons of freight, and nearly 100 head of cattle over his section during the preceding year.[20]

By now, enterprising citizens had located roadhouses along the entire route. Usually owned by homesteaders, these inns provided travelers with a convenient and comfortable place to stop. As most operators cultivated gardens, many supplied fresh vegetables in season. Not surprisingly, these lodges became the local nodes: what Richardson called "small centers of settlement and supply" from which to explore the adjoining country.[21] Several, like Gulkana, Big Delta, and Salcha, eventually grew into towns.

During the summer of 1909 maintenance of the Valdez Trail required nineteen crews. Each consisted of a foreman, cook, two teamsters, and about twenty laborers, plus a wagon and six to eight horses for moving camp and hauling timbers. "Plows and scrapers were used wherever practicable, although the greater part of the work, being in a broken and rocky country or through brush and timber swamp, had to be done by hand with pick, mattock, and shovel."[22]

In 1910 the trail received its first serious rival. Roughly parallelling its southernmost one-quarter, the Copper River and Northwestern Railway immediately captured most of the

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[18] ARC, *Annual Report, 1906*, 20-21.

[19] ARC, *Annual Report, 1907*, 119.

[20] ARC, *Annual Report, 1908*, 103.

[21] Ibid, 100.

[22] ARC, *Annual Report, 1909*, 3. A mattock is a digging tool with a blade at right angles to its handle.

freight traffic headed for the Chitina River valley. Because the train was faster, many Fairbanks-bound travelers also rode it. Disembarking in Chitina, they rejoined the Valdez-Fairbanks route via the newly constructed Chitina-Willow Creek (later Edgerton) Cutoff. Use of the Valdez to Willow Creek section subsequently declined.[23]

Ignoring the competition, the Board maintained its expenditures. In 1910 for example, it spent $248,782 on improving the trail. Eventually, its persistent efforts began to achieve results. That August, for example, Richardson made the first continuous trip over the route in a wagon.[24]

The following year the ARC built a new, 420-foot bridge over the Tonsina River, replacing one constructed by the military. Except for the Gulkana, Delta, Tanana, Salcha, and Piledriver Slough, all important rivers traversed by the trail were now bridged. Of the remaining five, only the Delta lacked a ferry.[25]

Bridge work continued in 1912. The Road Commission placed a 40-foot truss over Ptarmigan Creek, two 60-foot spans across Stewart Creek, and a 270-foot pile trestle over Gunn Creek. Most impressive, however, was its 748-foot bridge, possessing a single center king-post, over an unnamed glacier stream near the Miller Roadhouse.[26]

The new bridges contributed to another innovation. In 1913 the first motorized vehicle traveled the entire length of the trail. The automobile averaged about nine miles per hour, despite having to be "helped through soft spots on rather heavy grades."[27]

Other autos quickly followed. The Road Commission, however, largely ignored the phenomenon, declaring that it made "no pretense of having built roads adapted for automobile travel." Five years later its basic position remained unchanged. While acknowledging the increasing number of such vehicles, the Board still discouraged their use.[28]

Despite the ARC's objections, mechanized traffic now dominated the route. In 1918 the Board purchased two tractors, one eight-foot road grader, three six-foot road graders, four three-way road drags, and four heavy trucks. Automobile stage coaches now traveled regular routes between Valdez and Fairbanks and motorized vehicles carried most of the mail. No longer a

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[23] Claus-M. Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails: The Work of the Alaska Road Commission*, Alaska Historical Commission Studies in History No. 152 (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1986), 38, 61.

[24] ARC, *Annual Report, 1910*, 5, 13.

[25] ARC, *Annual Report, 1911*, 6, 9-12.

[26] ARC, *Annual Report, 1912*, 11-12.

[27] ARC, *Annual Report, 1913*, 12-13.

[28] ARC, *Annual Report, 1913*, 12; ARC, *Annual Report, 1918*, 1990.

trail, in 1919 the Road Commission conceded to the inevitable and redesignated it as the Richardson Road in honor of its newly retired first president, Col. Wilds P. Richardson.[29]

Maintenance and Use of the Richardson Road and Highway

Journeying to Alaska in 1923 to dedicate the Alaska Railroad, President Warren G. Harding inspected both ends of the Richardson Road. While he only viewed about 50 miles of the corridor, he was apparently impressed. In a speech delivered upon his return to Seattle, he noted that "our long national experience in pushing our highways ahead of the controlling wave of settlement ought to convince us that the broadest liberality towards roads in Alaska will be sure to bring manifold returns." In keeping with that belief, the President pledged "to serve Alaska generously, and more, in this matter of road building." Nothing, however, came of his promise; Harding died only a few days later.[30]

By 1925 tour companies throughout the United States advertised the road, now designated the Richardson Highway, as the center portion of the "Golden Belt Line." Appealing to the more adventurous traveler, this circular route stretched from Cordova to Seward and incorporated the Copper River and Northwest Railway at one end and the Alaska Railroad at the other. One major automobile carrier carried hundreds of passengers from Chitina to Fairbanks each season, operating a fleet of passenger vehicles over the road.[31]

Controversy erupted in 1932 when the Interior Department tried to increase the profitability of the Alaska Railroad by taxing Richardson Highway users. When most motorists ignored its license fee requirements, the Road Commission tried another tack: collecting a toll at the commission-operated ferry across the Tanana River. Commercial carriers quickly objected and, beginning in 1940, staged a general revolt. Rebellious truckers crossed the river on a home-built scow, defiantly flying a skull-and-crossbones flag. When challenged, one group even seized and disarmed the local U.S. deputy marshal. Despite such flagrant violations, the government was powerless to enforce its law. A Fairbanks grand jury judged the tax to be discriminatory and refused to return indictments against the accused. In 1942 Interior Secretary Harold L. Ickes finally bowed to the inevitable and repealed the toll.[32]

The threat of war brought many changes to the Richardson Highway. In 1940 Lt. Gen. John L. Dewitt, the commander of the U.S. Fourth Army, recognized that Anchorage was isolated and vulnerable to attack. To alleviate the danger, he proposed connecting the city to the road. Gen. Simon B. Buckner, the head of the Alaska Defense Command, agreed, further suggesting that

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[29] Ibid, 1989-90; ARC, *Annual Report, 1919*, 2099.

[30] ARC, *Annual Report, 1925*, 2070.

[31] William H. Wilson, "Ahead of the Times: The Alaska Railroad and Tourism, 1924-1941," *Alaska Journal* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1977): 21; Galen to Steese, April 20, 1924, Records of the Alaska Road Commission, box 65480, R.G. 30, National Archives-Alaska Region, Anchorage, Alaska.

[32] Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails*, Chapter 10, *passim*.

the highway be widened and straightened, and that its bridges be strengthened sufficiently tc withstand the anticipated increase in military traffic.[33]

Both were prudent requests. Following the outbreak of the Second World War, most of the men and supplies used to construct the Alaska section of the Alcan (now called the Alaska) Highway were moved along the Richardson, with materials flowing southeast from Fairbanks as well as north from Valdez. Finished in November 1942, the Alcan joined the Richardson Highway to the remainder of the North American highway system at the interior Alaskan village of Delta Junction.[34]

The Anchorage connection came more slowly. It was late 1943 before the Glenn Highway, named for pioneer Alaskan explorer, Capt. Edwin F. Glenn, linked the city to the Richardson Highway at Glennallen.[35]

F. Associated Property Types

Properties considered in this nomination to the National Register of Historic Places are noteworthy for their association with a significant pattern of events bearing on the settlement and development of Alaska. Historic association with the establishment of interior Alaska's first overland transportation network, for example, justifies their inclusion under Criterion A.

Two general property types are associated with transportation along the Valdez Trail: historic trail segments and bridges.

TRAIL SEGMENTS

Description

Historic trails are well-defined routes, whose consistent use is verifiable by either documentary evidence or field investigation. Historic trail segments are surviving pieces of a larger trail. These include portions of the primary corridor, which was used throughout the year, and alternative routes, which were only seasonally utilized. Not surprisingly, all followed natural corridors. In general, winter paths crossed frozen lowland areas while the summer routes ran along higher ground.

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[33] Ibid, 209-10.

[34] Lyman L. Woodman, "Building the Alaska Highway: A Saga of the Northland," *Northern Engineer* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 17-25; Theodore A. Huntley and R. E. Royall, *Construction of the Alaska Highway* (Washington: GPO, 1945), 96.

[35] ARC, *Annual Report, 1943*, 1, 6-7.

Trail segments often contain certain features that improved the roadbed, overcame physical obstacles, or made travel safer. These included ferry landings, culverts, log cribbing, and dry masonry. Ferry landings mark the respective ends of cable-tethered ferryboat crossings. Culverts are four-sided structures made of timbers and boards which lay cross-wise to and beneath the gravel roadbed and facilitate the free passage of water. Log cribbing is composed of stacked logs which support the roadbed in unstable areas. Dry masonry consists of stacked stones used as retaining walls or as approaches to bridges.

Significance

The Valdez Trail provided the first overland access to much of interior Alaska and played a major role in its subsequent development. The first paths associated with the Valdez Trail were established by Alaska Natives for subsistence activities and trading. Improved by the army in 1899 as part of a military packhorse route to Eagle City, it branched to Fairbanks in 1903, following a series of gold discoveries in and around the Tanana valley. Deemed suitable for only winter dogsled traffic in 1901, within four years it was regularly plied by horse-drawn bobsleds. In 1910 the first wagon travelled the trail from end to end. Only three years later, the first motorized vehicle made the journey. In response to such technological advances, the Alaska Road Commission continuously improved the trail, which in 1919 was re-designated the Richardson Road. Further upgraded between 1920 and 1940, the road gained importance following America's entry into the Second World War, when it carried the materials necessary for the defense of Alaska. Construction of the Alcan and Glenn highways in the early-1940s finally ended its relative isolation by connecting the route to Anchorage and the rest of the North American highway system.

Registration Requirements

An historic trail is a linear feature spanning an expanse of territory. Individual segments combine to convey a sense of the historic route of travel.

A discrete trail segment may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its historic association with the development of interior Alaska's first transportation network.

Individual trail segments are considered eligible if they retain key physical and environmental characteristics. Physical integrity demands the presence of actual trail remains. Environmental integrity requires that a trail maintains its natural setting.

Smaller associated features, like culverts, ferry landings, and equipment, are not individually eligible, although they may serve as contributing elements to an eligible property.

BRIDGES

Description

Bridges linked roadbed sections and are usually defined as man-made structures designed to span bodies of water or other topographic obstacles.

Significance

Bridges were important to the development of Alaska's land transportation. Difficult terrain required extensive bridging of rivers, streams, and creeks. The Alaska Road Commission built many bridges along the Valdez Trail, including both trusses and trestles. Both were subject to damage by flooding and ice. All were repaired, rebuilt, or relocated as necessary, some on numerous occasions.

Registration Requirements

Bridges that retain sufficient integrity may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for their association with the development of interior Alaska's transportation network.

Design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association all contribute to determining eligibility. Structures must possess both identifiable remains and be supported by historic documentation.

G. Geographical Data

Properties associated with the Valdez Trail lay along its historic corridors to both Eagle City and Fairbanks. Over the course of its approximately 700-mile length, the route embraces a broad variety of flora and terrain. Beginning on the glacial floodplain near the old townsite of Valdez, the path is first enveloped by dense coastal spruce and hemlock forest as it moves up the Lowe River valley, and then by thick brush as it approaches Keystone Canyon. As it ascends the southern slopes of the Chugach Mountains, the surrounding vegetation grows more sparse until it is finally reduced to alpine tundra near the summit of Thompson Pass. Descending to the north, the successive orders are reversed, though the interior forest is far less dense. The route follows the Tsina River to the Tiekel, which it then traces to its headwaters. It next crosses a low divide leading to the top of the Little Tonsina. From here, two variations exist: a summer trail, bearing to the east, traverses Kimball Pass and descends Bernard Creek to the Tonsina River; or a winter path, bearing further west, follows the Little Tonsina to the same destination. After crossing the Tonsina, the route traverses an extensive section of permafrost before intersecting the Klutina River near Copper Center. It next follows the west bank of the Copper River, meandering through typical interior forest to the Gulkana River. Here the trail splits.

The Eagle City branch continues up the Copper River, crossing the Gakona and Chistochina Rivers before traversing Mentasta Pass. Descending on the north side of the Alaska Range, the

trail intersects the Tanana River at Tanacross, passes Mansfield Lake, and winds through the Kechumstuk and Fortymile hills before reaching the Yukon River at Eagle City.

The Fairbanks fork follows the Gulkana River, which it traces to its headwaters. Gaining elevation, vegetation becomes progressively less dense, once more reverting to tundra below Isabel Pass, the summit of the Alaska Range. The trail descends along the east bank of the glacial Delta River, soon re-entering the forest. Just before Donnelly Dome, the trail again diverges. A winter path takes a shortcut across the Tanana River flats, intersecting the main route near the mouth of the Little Delta River. The summer trail continues down the Delta, taking a drier, if more circuitous path. Reaching the Delta Rivers's confluence with the Tanana River, the route crosses to the latter's north bank and follows it northwest to Fairbanks.

H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

This multiple property nomination of the Valdez Trail to the National Register of Historic Places is primarily based on archival research conducted by National Park Service historian Geoffrey Bleakley in the fall of 1994. A field survey of the route's Copper Bluff segment was completed in 1996. Most of the route remains unexamined.

Properties located within the Valdez Trail corridor reflect two primary themes: transportation and communications. These in turn generated two historic contexts: (1) Transportation along the Valdez Trail, 1898-1943; (2) The Development of Communications along the Valdez Trail, 1901-1943.

In drafting this nomination, Bleakley identified associated property types, basing integrity requirements on existing National Register criteria.

I. Major Bibliographic References

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