

From: John F. Bennett
Sent: Tuesday, July 7, 1998 1:09 PM
To: TED D JOHNSON
Cc: TERRY L RICHARDS
Subject: Valdez Gold Rush Trail

Ted, as a part of filling out the SSB for this project I have looked a bit at the background information on the old trail. Although I don't have much in the way of definitive maps or history, I think we have enough to deal with the ROW issues.

The old trail was a part of the military Valdez-Eagle route started in about 1900.

According to the USGS Quads (Valdez A-5 and A-6 dated 1951 based on 1950 photography and revised as of 1980), the Bear creek segment of the trail starts in Section 14 of T.9S., R.4W., CRM at the northerly portal of the abandoned tunnel, heads northerly into Section 11, then easterly to Bear creek in Section 12, then proceeds northeasterly through Section 7 & 6 of T.9S., R.3W., CRM to "Wortmann's" camp where it intersects with the existing highway.

I don't have a clear understanding of where the Snow Slide Gulch is located, at least its not obvious on the USGS quad. Either is not clear enough to show up in the 1950's photography or the map or I'm looking in the wrong place.

A major reconstruction and realignment of the Richardson occurred in the early 1950's. The earliest as-builts I have found are for Section H of the Richardson, a 36 mile segment starting in Valdez. The date has been worn off the drawings but I suspect they were prepared in 1950-1951. The 1953 Alaska Road Commission Annual Report states that on this section, construction advanced from 68-92% completion during that season. It also noted construction of the Lowe River Bridge at MP 16 to replace a structure destroyed by a snowslide in 1949. The New Bridge opened to traffic in the fall of 1952. The as-built plan view pretty much only shows the old road where it leaves the new alignment at the tunnel's north portal and its return near Wortmann's.

Our first set of ROW plans are for the Richardson MP 16-19 project approved in May of 1982. This pretty much followed the old alignment except where Bear creek enters the Lowe River where there was a major realignment. In 1983 as a part of that project, DOT sent a letter to the City of Valdez stating the Department's desire to turn the maintenance, operation, authority and responsibility of the old bridge that crosses Bear creek (located on the Goat trail) to be preserved as a historical monument. I found no response to that letter in our files.

Both of the townships that this project lies within were patented to the State of Alaska in 1975 & 1976. The Township survey plat for T9S, R4W, shows the old trail splitting off from the north end of the old tunnel and continuing southeasterly along the Lowe River so it is unclear why it did not show up on the USGS quad.

With regard to status of the ROW for the old trail: The first PLO ROW for the Richardson in this area was PLO 601, effective 8/10/49 which provided a withdrawal of 300', 150' on each side of centerline. Although the new road had not been completed at that time, the 300' wide ROW was apparently intended to apply to it. Certain sections of the old Richardson that were segregated by realignments and that the Department intended to maintain in the highway system were specifically renamed and numbered as "local" roads subject to a ROW width of 100' (i.e. Spengler road in Delta). This part of the old trail was not included among them. Therefore, the ROW that applies in this case would be that of an RS-2477 ROW. As this segment crosses state lands, it would be subject to the full 100', 50' on each side of centerline as provided in Title 19 of the statutes. I recently sent an e-mail over to Lisa Harbo who works in the RS-2477 project at DNR. She said that the RS-2477 project identified a trail, RST#1359 Wortman's Old Road, but did not complete the research on the route. She said it should be easy to do and has put it on her "to do" list.

In 1992 DNR added to their regulations, 11AAC51 titled "Nomination, Identification and management of RS2477 rights of Way." Section 11AAC51.100 "Management..." states that the Commissioner has management authority over the use of any RS2477 right of way that is not on the Alaska highway system. I presume the old trail is not on the system, and therefore, although a public ROW exists, we will have to keep DNR in the loop. The AAC also says "Certain land use actions on RS 2477 rights of way, including road construction, may require a permit under 11 AAC 96.010, or other authorization by the department." The commissioner can by agreement transfer the RS 2477 ROW to DOT&PF or to a local government for management purposes. So at some point we need to decide, (if it hasn't been already), if we want DNR to transfer management to us or to the City.

In any event, ROW certification should be no problem. One question I won't ask DNR yet until we decide who is to manage this trail, is if they will impose as-built mapping requirements as a part of the transfer. That is a possibility.

Finally, I got a call from Aeromap a couple of weeks ago requesting information about a bench mark on the Sheep Creek bridge. Apparently, they have just flown some airborne GPS controlled photography for the base of a GIS for the City of Valdez. Therefore, there is available some good, recent, controlled photography of the project area. However, I don't know at what scale. Depending on what you intend to use for plan development, I might be worthwhile to look into this.

JohnB.