



History Department
Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-0860

November 14, 1988

Norman Piispanen
Northern Region Planning
DOT&PF
600 University Avenue, Suite B
Fairbanks, AK 99709-1096

Dear Norman,

This serves as a progress report on the historic trails project.

The principal investigator began work in October, and used the 20 percent of his research time paid by the University of Alaska Fairbanks. As agreed upon, this time is donated to the historic trails project.

The investigator prepared a narrative on the Chisana and Nabesna region, including the Gakona to Chisana trail. The report comes up to 1914. Appended is a 1913 report by 1st Lt. Stuart A. Howard on his Chisana River Exploring Expedition.

During November and December, the P.I. is carefully going through every annual report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, later the Alaska Road Commission, from 1905-1956, looking for evidence of trails maintained by that organization. Anything pertinent will be xeroxed and identified.

Another good source are the the publications of the U.S. Geological Survey. All pertinent ones will be identified and important information xeroxed.

The P.I. also has written to the Federal Records Center in Seattle, inquiring about the content of the maintenance materials maintained by the Alaska Road Commission. Unfortunately, only a small portion of these records survive. The bulk were either discarded by the ARC over the years or subsequently destroyed by the FRC. If pertinent materials show up, these will be xeroxed.

So far, no money from the \$30,000 contract has been used. The P.I. does not anticipate that any funds will be used in the foreseeable future, except for some xerox monies in the new year. The research and writing has been and will be conducted with the 20 percent donated research time.

Sincerely,

Claus-M. Naske, Ph.D.
Professor of History

CMN:sl

The Chisana and Nabesna Rivers

I. Location

The Chisana and Nabesna rivers unite to form the "Ohio of the North," the Tanana River. Draining an area of almost 6,000 square miles near the Canadian border, the Chisana and Nabesna rivers flow through a region that was long considered to be one of the most inaccessible in Alaska. At the same time, however, many people over the years believed that the best natural transportation corridor into the interior of Alaska was through the Upper Tanana Valley. In the early years of this century, various railroad builders, including Falcon Joslin, the President of the Tanana Valley Railroad in Fairbanks, suggested that a railway be constructed from Haines to Fairbanks that would run down the length of the Tanana Valley, passing near the lower reaches of the Chisana and Nabesna rivers.

In a discussion of possible railway routes in Alaska, geologist Alfred Brooks wrote that he thought the Tanana valley route across the White River drainage and down along the Tanana was one of the best, except for the fact that it had to pass through Canadian territory. "There can be no doubt," he wrote in 1905, "that this is the natural route into the interior, and it was long used by the Natives in their intertribal intercourse."¹

From this railroad along the Tanana Valley, Brooks concluded, it would be a simple matter to construct branch lines up to the heads of the Nabesna and Chisana rivers to tap the known copper deposits there. The railroad down the Tanana Valley was never constructed, but during World War II, the Alcan Highway was built along a similar route as that proposed by the early railroad men, entering Alaska through the lower Chisana River Valley. By that time, however, there were well established transportation routes from the Copper River basin to the upper Nabesna and Chisana Rivers. Because mining in the area was on the decline, there

was no incentive to construct the branch lines up from the Tanana that Brooks had proposed long ago. There were overland trails between the Tanana and the heads of the Chisana and Nabesna River valleys, but some traffic between the Tanana and the upper reaches of its two sources went along the rivers.

II. Physical Characteristics

The Chisana and Nabesna rivers are glacial streams which flow from the Chisana and Nabesna Glaciers, respectively, in the Wrangell Mountains. The Chisana is 110 miles in length, while the Nabesna is 73 miles long. The streams run parallel to each other 25 miles apart for a distance of about 60 miles until the Chisana curves to the northwest in a broad arc to meet the Nabesna and form the Tanana River.

The terrain through which the streams pass is similar. Both cut through "deep canyon-like valleys" in the mountains, where the meandering braided channels of the rivers are constricted, before entering into a broad outwash plain to the north. The altitude of the Nabesna River where it leaves the mountains is 2,000 feet, while at a corresponding point the altitude on the Chisana is 2,500 feet.²

III. History of Chisana Valley

The recorded history of the Chisana River begins with Lieutenant Henry Allen's trip up the Copper River and down the Tanana River in 1885.³ In his report, Allen noted a trail that the Indians had told him about, which was four days portage from Batzulnetas Village in the Copper River Valley, to the White River Valley, across the head of the Chisana. This trail went through Cooper Pass, down Notch Creek and Cross Creek to the Chisana. This route from the Copper and Nabesna valleys to the Chisana was later an important overland route during

the Chisana gold stampede. As Fred Moffit noted in a description of the geology of the Nutzotin Mountains in 1943:

Within the district there are certain well-established routes of travel. The fairly well-defined depression between the Nutzotin Mountains and the Wrangell Mountains is the natural route for travel from the Copper River Valley to the heads of the Chisana and White Rivers. The trail through the depression leaves the Nabesna River at the old Indian Village, about half a mile above the mouth of Cooper Creek, and ascends that creek to Cooper Pass, between Cooper and Notch Creeks, whence it follows Notch Creek to Cross Creek and the Chisana River. Cooper Pass, which has an altitude of 5,000 feet, is the highest ground crossed by the trail between the Copper and White Rivers. Because of this altitude it is snowed in early in the fall and rarely is clear of drifts before the beginning of summer. It offers two routes for crossing the summit, the "summer trail" which keeps to the northeast of a prominent northwestward-trending mountain range, and the "winter trail," which swings around the southwest side of the ridge. The two trails are nearly parallel for about 8 miles and nowhere are more than 1 1/2 miles apart. The winter trail has the easier grades but is not used in summer as the great number of granite boulders on the stream bars makes travel with horses difficult and dangerous. The summer trail necessitates a steep climb by south-bound travellers of more than 500 feet on the north side of the summit, and for more than one mile just north of the summit it follows a smooth mountain slope along the south side of a narrow lake where footing is uncertain because of the shallow soil and is especially treacherous if the trail is covered with snow.⁴

Moreover, a geological report on the Nabesna-White River district published in 1910 stated, "The trail from Nabesna River to White River...lies in the depression

between Wrangell and Nutzotin Mountains and follows the valley of the Cooper, Notch (or Trail), Geohenda, and Solo Creeks. The distance is about 60 miles, and no great obstacles to travel are encountered."⁵

In 1891, an expedition organized by U.S. Army Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka set out to explore the region north of the St. Elias Mountains, and it brought back the first reliable information about the area. C. W. Hayes, a member of the expedition, wrote in *National Geographic*,

Between Yukon River and the St. Elias Mountains lies a large area, embracing the whole of the White River and its tributaries, as well as the headwaters of the Copper and Tanana, which has been geographically a blank. So far as can be learned it had never been penetrated by white men, and the lakes, rivers and mountains which may appear on any maps are products of the geographer's imagination.⁶

Hayes, Schwatka, a prospector named Mark Russell, and seven Indians went overland toward the head of the White River, and through Skolai Pass, and into the Cooper River Valley. Though they did not reach the Chisana Valley, the expedition was the first to make reliable maps of the area, and their reports of copper finds encouraged more prospectors to come into the Wrangell Mountains country.

In 1898, as a result of the new interest in Alaska generated by the Klondike Gold Rush and reports about the minerals of the White River, Alfred Brooks and William Peters of the United States Geological Survey made a reconnaissance trip up the White River and down the Tanana. In his review of the history of the Tanana River, Brooks said, "Above the point reached by Lieutenant Allen (the mouth of the Tetlin River), the Tanana was up to the last summer practically unexplored."⁷

Brooks, Peters, and four camp hands struggled up the White River with three canoes and poled their way up the Snag River. Each canoe was loaded with 900 pounds of provisions and equipment, which they estimated would last three months. Brooks' description of the difficulties of their canoe trip up the White River reads like the accounts and stories told years later by the gold stampeder who poled their way up the Chisana, Nabesna, and White Rivers. The problems Brooks met on the White River were the typical hazards of water transportation facing trappers, prospectors, Native hunters, and explorers, when men daily challenged the shallow rivers of Interior Alaska with nothing but a small boat and a long pole. Alfred Brooks and his companions started up the White River on June 8, 1898, and he later wrote about their trip up the river.

To their "great delight" they eventually found that Mirror Creek, a tributary of the Chisana, "had its source in the broad flat through which Snag River flows." They made preparations to portage across the divide. As Brooks explains:

After some investigation we selected our route for portaging and cut a trail through from one stream to the other, a distance of about five miles. Our portage trail lay through a flat swampy area, and the transportation of our canoes and supplies proved no easy task, though far easier than we expected, and it was accomplished in three days. We then started our downstream trip. Our easy progress down the clear waters of Mirror Creek contrasted strongly with our struggle against the swift, muddy current of the White and its tributary. The only obstacles were the frequent log jams through which we had to cut our way, or where this was not feasible, made a portage. After a journey of some 60 miles we reached the Tanana River and found it here to be a stream of considerable size.⁸

Brooks, like most of the other early explorers, refers to the Chisana River as the Tanana. With one-third of their supplies left, or about 300 pounds of supplies

in each canoe, they descended the Chisana from the mouth of the Mirror Creek to the junction of the Chisana and Nabesna, and then down the Tanana to the Fortymile Trail. For several miles on the Chisana River below Mirror Creek, he wrote:

There are a series of small rapids, and in one of these our canoe was injured on a snag, requiring a delay of several hours for repairs. Below this, to where the Fortymile Trail (Tanacross) comes in, the current is seldom more than 3 or 4 miles an hour, and frequently it was scarcely noticeable, the river being practically a series of lakes.⁹

The headwaters of the Chisana still had not been explored in 1898, and Brooks could only add that the source of the river was "supposed to be near that of the White." But he did point out that, coming down the mountains, the river flowed through a gravel floored lowland, until the mouth of the Mirror Creek where it turned to the northwest. "The valleys of Gardner and Scottie Creeks, as well as of Mirror Creek, have flat gravel-bottoms and are practically continuations of flats of the main river. The size of these valleys is entirely disproportionate to the streams which now occupy them."¹⁰

In 1899 the headwaters of the Chisana were mapped and explored for the first time by two different parties. Brooks and Peters were again assigned to do reconnaissance in the area. In the upper White River, they met two prospectors, E. J. Cooper and H. A. Hammond, who were "presumably" the first men to bring a pack train through the Cooper Pass-Chisana route to the White River valley, which Lt. Henry Allen had noted on his map of 1885.¹¹ After examining the copper prospects in the upper White River, Peters, Brooks, and four companions crossed a low divide and on August 14 "reached the glacier in which the Tanana River heads." Going down the Chisana River with horses they crossed into the Nabesna River valley via Cooper Pass, and headed for the Tanana River. In Brooks'

opinion, this route to the Tanana Valley was suitable for a pack trail.¹² Later in the same summer another geologist, Oscar Rohn, and a companion, examined copper prospects and made further exploration of the best "All American" route to the Klondike gold fields. They ascended the Nizina Glacier and crossed into the Tanana Valley, coming down the Chisana Glacier. At the foot of the Chisana Glacier, they found two stone cairns left by Peters and Brooks and saw the tracks of their horses on the river bottoms. Rohn said, "We followed the tracks of this party through the pass to the Nabesna and found them to lead down the banks of this stream." Instead of floating down the Nabesna to the Tanana, they followed the overland portage to Batzulnetas on the Copper River, which an Indian described to them.¹³

Brooks made no specific mention of crossing the Chisana, but he did say, "A party making a trip in this region which involved crossing any of the larger rivers should carry a folding boat or the equipment for constructing one. We used a heavy, waterproofed canvas which we stretched over a framework by the use of a few simple tools." Though he said that much of the area was not favorable for boating, Brooks pointed out that "most of the larger rivers can be descended in boats at certain times in the year....the Upper Tanana (Chisana) below the gorge, as well as the Nabesna, are favorable for the use of small boats, as are the larger lakes."¹⁴

A much more detailed survey than the reconnaissance trips of Brooks and Rohn was made by geologists Witherspoon and Schrader in 1902. Their findings were published in a 1903 report which contained all the known facts about the economic opportunities of the region. They wrote that it was "improbable" that any more geological surveys would be done until there was more mining activity in the area.¹⁵ In a discussion of the trails in the district the report described the

trail from Batzulnetas village southward in the depression between Mentasta and Nutzotin Mountains.

From a point on the Nabesna nearly opposite the mouth of Platinum Creek about 1 1/2 miles above the mouth of Cooper Creek, a trail leads up Cooper Creek, over Cooper Pass and down Notch Creek to the Chisana. From here, horses can be taken up Cross Creek nearly to the foot of Cross Glacier or up the river to the foot of Chisana Glacier, and through a considerable portion of the country between Cross Creek and Euchre Mountain. From the mouth of Cross Creek they can be used down the river through the so-called Chisana Canyon and Nutzotin Mountains to the open country of the Tanana Valley.

From a few miles below the foot of Chisana Glacier the trail continues southeastward, apparently by several different routes, to the White River. Of these, the most direct route seems to strike the White about 15 miles below Skolai Pass and 6 miles below Russell Glacier. None of the latter routes, however, were travelled by the survey party during the season of 1902.

Another route feasible for pack horses from the Nabesna to the Chisana and White River is in the open country along the north base of the Nutzotin Mountains. This is probably the most direct route for reaching the Attul and the middle White River country in the region of the mouth of the Donjek. It was followed by the survey party from the Chisana to the Nabesna during the past season. The region, however, contains considerable underbrush and in some places is swampy.¹⁶

After Witherspoon and Schrader's 1902 survey, the broad outlines of the map of the Chisana watershed were filled in. It had been only nine years since C. W.

Hayes wrote that the area was "geographically a blank" and that the lakes, rivers, and mountains shown on the maps were products of a "geographer's imagination."

F. H. Moffit and Adolph Knopf estimated in 1908 that there were only 45-50 Natives living in the area between the headwaters of the Copper and White Rivers, primarily in three villages: Batzulnetas on the Copper, a village on the Nabesna at the mouth of Cooper Creek, and a village on Cross Creek, opposite the mouth of Notch Creek, in the Chisana Valley.¹⁷ All three villages were on the major trail of this area, which ran through the Wrangell-Nutzotin Mountain trench, connecting the heads of the Copper and White Rivers. There were marked differences, however, between the three villages:

The Batzulnetas and Nabesna natives rely on the white man for a considerable portion of their food, but the Chisana natives are more independent. Their more isolated position has brought them less in contact with white men, and they have maintained their own manner of living to a greater extent. They depend almost entirely on game for food and lay up a good supply each fall for the winter's needs.¹⁸

The only other activity Moffit and Knopf recorded in the Chisana Valley was a logging operation near Euchre Mountain. Moffit wrote, "The best timber seen during the summer was on the flats east of Chisana River near Euchre Mountain, where a saw pit had been erected and boat material had been cut. Trees 18 to 20 inches or more at the butt are common here."¹⁹

Early in the twentieth century prospectors came into the Nabesna-White River area looking for copper and gold. A reported strike in 1902 caused a small stampede but nothing substantial was found. A few of these prospectors worked their way into the Chisana, but with the exception of a gold lode at the mouth of Bonanza Creek, which was staked and restaked several times, little was discovered

until the summer of 1913. During the years 1903-1913 there were only a dozen or two prospectors working in the entire area.²⁰

Stephen Capps' 1916 report, *The Chisana-White River District*, is the most detailed source on the Chisana watershed, and it explains "As is usual with history that is passed along largely by word of mouth, there are conflicting stories of the events that led to the discovery of the gold placer district."²¹ The most accurate account seems to be the following:

In the summer of 1912 three partners, William James, Peter Nelson, and Frederick Best, came into the Upper White River basin to prospect. During that summer a native, known as Indian Joe, brought James to the mouth of Bonanza Creek to show him a gold-quartz lode there, the same lode which had been staked several years earlier, but on which no development work had been done. The Indian also claims that he had discovered placer gold near by and he showed this to James, but this James denies. While in the neighborhood James did some panning and got encouraging prospects. In 1913 James, Nelson, and a Mrs. Wales returned to Bonanza Creek to do further prospecting and made their first discovery on a bend 10 feet above the creek on the left side, at the upper end of what is now Discovery claim.²²

Once the news of the strike reached Dawson, the stampede began, one that some people thought might be the biggest since the discovery of the Klondike itself. Several thousand people rushed into the district that summer, and in the following year, there were few streams that the prospectors missed in their search for gold.²³

Early in June 1913, four men left Fairbanks in poling boats loaded with supplies "sufficient for a year's stay in the unprospected wilderness of the upper Tanana." They planned to prospect in the area around the Chisana River, known

locally as the Shushana, and faced almost a five hundred mile trip up the Tanana River, knowing that for "long stretches it will be necessary for the men to line, because of the swift current."²⁴ Definite word of the Chisana strike reached Fairbanks several weeks later, and there was a full-fledged campaign by the businessmen of Fairbanks to promote the "All-American" route to the Chisana up the Tanana in the wake of the two poling boats, instead of the alien Canadian route from Dawson City up the White River. One newspaper headline read "TANANA RIVER IS NATURAL HIGHWAY." The merchants of Fairbanks hoped Chisana stamperders would buy their goods in Fairbanks, and then proceed to the diggings by the "natural highway." To promote the virtues of the "natural highway," the Fairbanks Commercial Club sent advertisements to the *Seattle Times*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligence*, and *Ruby Record Citizen*, the *Iditarod Pioneer*, the *Tanana News*, and the *Nome Nugget*. These advertisements said, in part:

If you intend to go the Shushana (Chisana) diggings, go the best way. The Fairbanks route by way of the Tanana River is the nearest and only feasible water route. Study the map. Boats are leaving every day. Remember goods shipped by Canadian route are subject to customs duty as boundary line.²⁵

The Fairbanks Commercial Club ostensibly interviewed everyone in town who knew anything about the Chisana district before printing the advertisement. "By that time it had been ascertained, from men who knew the country, that the Tanana River route offers far more advantages than can be had by any other route, and is practically the only route open for transportation of supplies in any quantity to the diggings."²⁶ Emphasis on the White River's poor navigability was a central part of the argument presented for the "All-American" route in the *Fairbanks Daily Times*: "So far as the White River is concerned, it is claimed that the river at best is only navigable to the head of the Donjek, by boats such as

those of the Sidestream Navigation Company, and that point is 105 miles from the scene of the strike. Others claim that any kind of steamboats at most times of the year have all kinds of difficulties in navigating the White River."²⁷

At first Fairbanks thought the gold strike had been made on Gardner and Scotty Creeks, right bank tributaries of the lower Chisana, and half-a-dozen men in Fairbanks who had been in the White River country "were unanimous in the opinion that the Tanana River offers the only feasible route to the diggings...."²⁸

W. H. Merrit, a trader from the upper Tanana, who also thought the discovery had been made at the head of Gardner Creek, 32 miles from the mouth of the Chisana, said, "It is possible to get within twelve miles of the diggings in a poling boat."²⁹

W. H. Newton, a trader from Healy River on the upper Tanana, was interviewed by the *Fairbanks Daily Times* about the conditions stampeders might meet. Newton said the gold discovery was further up the Chisana than earlier reported, near the base of a tall dome. He described the river route to the diggings. "From the Tanana Crossing to the Shushana (Chisana), and far up the Shushana, the water is so slack that the wind will blow a boat upstream. The trouble with an all water route from Fairbanks exists between Fairbanks and Tanana Crossing, which is very difficult because of swift currents. The best way then would be to mush to Tanana Crossing, build a boat there, and pole to the new fields."³⁰

The problem with this plan, Newton said, was that he had no provisions to spare at his Tanana Crossing trading post. Later in the summer, after supplies for the winter had arrived, maybe he could outfit some stampeders, but the way it looked at the moment, "Whatever supplies go into the country this summer will go from Dawson."³¹

Newton had some sobering comments about the "natural highway" to the new fields of gold: "While the water route from Tanana Crossing to the new fields is almost level, the river bottoms are soft and muddy, and poor for poling. A motor launch would be the right thing, but a motor launch starting from Fairbanks for Tanana Crossing would meet certain disaster along the way. The valley above Tanana Crossing is about three miles wide, and the river crosses and re-crosses, making as crooked a channel as exists anywhere in Alaska."³²

Newton obviously was the most knowledgeable man in town about the upper Tanana; unfortunately, much of his warning proved all too true for those stampedeers on the "natural highway." But Newton did hold out some hope for the summer trail, which he called "dry and well defined as far as the Tanana Crossing. Beyond Tetlin....it would be prudent to hire Indian guides."³³ Newton gave the mileages about Tanana Crossing as follows: "Tanana Crossing to Relay cabin-22 miles. Left limit. First 17 miles known as 'Dry Stretch,' no water. Relay cabin to Tetlin Lake-22 miles. Indian village. Nabesna to Big Bend country. Shushana River-about 60 miles. Indian trail."³⁴

About the same time that Newton predicted a shortage of supplies for unwary stampedeers, trader W. H. Merrit, the head of the Nabesna Trading Company, announced that he was going to bring 20 tons of general supplies up the Tanana on the steamer *Dusty Diamond*. (Merrit had earlier said stampedeers could get within 12 miles of the strike on the Chisana with poling boats.) The *Dusty Diamond* was a 101-ton steamer built at St. Michael in 1898, which operated mainly on the "side streams" of Alaska. Carrying 12 passengers and a 20-ton outfit, Merrit planned to land his goods "at the mouth of the Nabesna River, if possible at the mouth of the Chisana" and start a trading post. He said that his post would be established "at the head of navigation for small boats such as the *Dusty Diamond*."³⁵

Merrit, however, warned everyone that supplies at the diggings still would not be plentiful or inexpensive. "The camp for the present at least," said Mr. Merrit, "will be a dollar a pound camp. I am afraid that many have started out afoot or in poling boats with an insufficient supply of grub, and there is little doubt in my mind but that we will have to pick up many prospectors on the trip up the river. Please be sure to warn those intending to go to the new strike, not to start out unless they are fully loaded with food and supplies."³⁶

Merrit and the *Dusty Diamond* left Fairbanks on July 15, 1913, expecting to return in about two weeks, but meanwhile others were getting into the act. Three Fairbanks men announced they would leave for the Nabesna River in the "motor boat *Zodiac*" in order to examine the situation and possibly establish "a trading station as near as possible to the new strike in the Shusana if conditions warrant." The first trip would only be an inspection of the area, and the *Zodiac's* owners said "no great quantities of goods will be taken."³⁷

Men in poling boats with one or two tons of supplies were leaving daily, moreover, intending to stay all winter at the new strike. But on the same day that the trip of the *Zodiac* was made public, news of the *Dusty Diamond's* failure to ascend the Tanana reached Fairbanks. "Unable to navigate the waters of the upper Tanana River, the steamer *Dusty Diamond* returned to Fairbanks on Sunday night. The trip was made as far as the Thirty-Mile house, with considerable difficulty, and the freight, most of it for W. H. Merrit, the trader, was unloaded there. The hull of the boat is said to have suffered considerable injury in the trip and her machinery is now being transferred to a barge, which is claimed will draw considerable less water. Mr. Merrit returned overland to the city yesterday and he says that he will make another endeavor to land his trading post outfit at the mouth of the Nabesna. With the *Shusana*, as the new boat, made from the barge

Iditarod, and the machinery of the *Dusty Diamond*....he believes he will be able successfully to buck the swift waters of the river."³⁸

Fred Best, one of the first stakers of the Chisana, reached Dawson City in the middle of July and gave an up-to-date account of the new discovery. he said both Bonanza and Little Eldorado were staked "from end to end," and when he left, "stakers were planting poles in Coarse Money Gulch, Gold Run, Wilson, and other creeks in the immediate vicinity." The people from Dawson were also going into the Chisana by way of the White River. Some used horses, and some went up the White in small boats to the Snag, "from which point they will go overland to the Shusana." Others went up the 134-ton steamer *Vidette*, put on the White River run by the Sidestreams Navigation Company. The *Vidette* would go to the head of steamboat navigation and passengers would then transfer to poling boats at a spot 60 river miles below the start of the overland trail. The trail from the White River to the discovery ran about 40 miles cross country.³⁹

The traffic on the Tanana en route to the Chisana strike was reaching its peak. In the next two weeks, the *Fairbanks Daily Times* announced the departure of four steamers of various sizes (*Martha Clow*--98 tons, *Reliance*--291 tons, *Shushana*--49 tons, *Tetlin*--65 tons, and *Flora*) and the motor launches *Titantic* and *Christopher Columbus*. Several poling boats also left town for the new district.

Captain Finger of the *Martha Clow* was confident that he could easily reach the Tanana Crossing and he planned to go up the Chisana as far as possible. His boat had a new firebox boiler and engines, "well-equipped for the work ahead of her. Her boiler can develop ninety horsepower and Captain Finger expects no trouble in getting his vessel to the head of navigation on the Tanana River and as close to the diggings as any steamboat will be able to go." The steamboat *Reliance* of the Northern navigation Company was also prepared to ascend the Tanana to the Chisana strike. This was taken as an indication of the dimensions of the

strike. The *Reliance*, called "the best shallow water boat in Alaska" had been built especially for the navigation of small rivers and shallow streams.⁴⁰

The steamer *Tetlin*, under the command of Captain Northway, left Fairbanks on July 29, 1913, drawing only 18 to 20 inches of water. With a load of six tons of supplies, a "full crew," and fifteen passengers, Captain Northway expected his steamer "will have no trouble in making the headwaters of the river, as she had already made five trips carrying a larger load than she is carrying this time." Northway said that he would spend the rest of the summer freighting supplies with the *Tetlin* from McCarthy's to Tetlin. The supplies would be sent overland from Fairbanks to McCarthy's, where he would transfer them to his steamer. The *Tetlin* was a "high powered boat for her size" and it was believed that she would have no trouble making the "headwaters" of the river.⁴¹

Northway's solution for the problem of navigating the Tanana between Fairbanks and the Delta River was popular. Groves' auto-truck left on the same night as the *Tetlin* to drive the trail to McCarthy's, carrying a full load of freight and passengers for the Chisana. The truck carried the motorboat *Titanic*, owned by three men who hoped to reach "a point as near as the new camp as they can possibly get by the water route." The freight on Groves' truck also included "gasoline to be stored at McCarthy's to supply the needs of power boats that will make the journey from Fairbanks to the Chisana."⁴²

Other people were going to Gulkana with horses, wagons, and pack trains, like the Bartlett-Kelly party, and Bert Johnson's outfit. These men planned to take the portage trail between the Wrangell and Nutzotin Mountains. Yet the easiest way to the diggings still seemed to be by boat. The small steamer *Flora* with the S. B. Waite party left on July 31, and the *Martha Clow* departed on August 1 with a full load of passengers. The launch *Christopher Columbus* with a party of seven, and the *Reliance* with 56 passengers soon followed.⁴³

On August 7 there was a report containing some very bad news for those hoping to reach the Chisana by boat. Trader Newton of Tanana Crossing said the Tanana River was falling rapidly and had dropped two feet in the last week. Since there was only four feet of water before the fall, Newton believed "it is certain that there is trouble ahead for even the light draft boats." The *Fairbanks Times* commented, "Unusually heavy rains would help the plight of the steamboats, but unless these occur there is little likelihood of there being any considerable rise in the river as the general supply of water for the Tanana comes from the glaciers."⁴⁴

The very next day's headlines in the *Times* dramatically emphasized the difficulty of navigating the Tanana: "IMPOSSIBLE TO GET UP IN MOTOR BOATS." The accompanying story said that "it is impossible to get up the Tanana River with motor boats is the opinion of Jack Biglow, the mining operator, who left Fairbanks on the steamer *Reliance* a few days ago. In a telegram sent to Dr. Sutherland yesterday evening, Jack Biglow wires: 'Impossible to get up in motor boats. River tough. Don't try it.' The message was sent from Delta, before tougher water on the stretch to McCarthy's had been reached. In spite of the warning Dr. Sutherland's party intends to leave with his motor boat *Nona* on Sunday afternoon or Monday morning. The new Scripps engine came in yesterday afternoon. It is a thirty-horsepower engine, and the doctor is anxious to find out what it can do in the swift water."⁴⁵

The missionary, the Rev. Betticher, who had been on an inspection trip to the Mission at Tanana Crossing, said some boats were doing fine but others were having difficulties. The *Fairbanks Daily Times* reported that "on the way down Mr. Betticher reports having passed six poling boat outfits, all of them above McCarthy's. Some reported an easy passage while others had had trouble. he passed none below McCarthy's. The steamer *Tetlin* was passed at Tenderfoot. The

Martha Clow was on a bar five miles above Salcha, and had been there all day. The *Reliance* was passed Thursday at 6 o'clock.⁴⁶

On the following day, a *Times* headline read: "ANOTHER WARNING TO MOTOR BOATMEN": "Further confirmation of the report that the upper Tanana River is not good sailing for motor boats was received yesterday in telegrams received from several members of the party that left in the sternwheeler *Christopher Columbus*. This boat reached Salcha on Friday, after being about eight days on the trip. In a wire to Romeo N. Hoyt, Charles Martin, one of the party, said; 'Having a tough time. Advise everyone not to tackle the Tanana with motor boats.' Martin is somewhat an expert with power boats, so his advise (sic) to those who know him will probably be given some consideration."⁴⁷

One of the men who failed to get to the headwaters of the Tanana by motorboat was Chris Lauredson. In nine days he got only as far as Salcha and then gave up. Lauredson now decided to go to Gulkana by the new motorcycle that he just purchased and then go overland on the trail with a pack horse. His partners, who also failed to ascend the river, started overland to McCarthy's, from where they planned to proceed up river by poling boat.⁴⁸

On August 19, the steamer *Reliance* returned from the mouth of the Nabesna River, in what was the fastest and most successful trip of the year. "Having taken just 12 days to make the round trip, the steamer *Reliance*, of the Northern Navigation Company, returned from the mouth of the Nabesna River yesterday evening at about 7:30 o'clock. She reports having experienced little difficulty in making the trip up the river and having landed her large list of stampedees at what must be considered the head of navigation of the Tanana for steamboats. Officers of the steamboat state that the Nabesna River at its mouth is unnavigable for steamboats. The delta is wide and the water is very swift and very shallow. Even poling boats would have a hard time in getting up the river, although it is

probably better water beyond the delta. The Chisana River, which, with the Nabesna, forms the Tanana, is, on the other hand, almost sluggish. It is very shallow, there being not more than one and one-half feet of water. At a point a few miles this side of the Nabesna River a townsite was established and called 'Reliance.' It is estimated that this place is from 40 to 45 miles from the diggings, although of this there is no certainty, as no white men were ever met by the *Reliance* nor any Indians who could give any reliable information as to the location of the strike. Most of the men who went up on the *Reliance* at once started over for the diggings, some in poling boats and some on foot. Tetlin Indians claimed that they could go up the Nabesna and across to the Chisana, on foot, in three days, while it would take five days to pole up the Chisana. Some of these Indians were hired by the stampeders, some of whom took the Chisana route, others by way of the Nabesna."⁴⁹

The manager of the Northern Commercial Company, Mr. Coleman, who went along with the *Reliance* said the worst water in the Tanana River was between Johnson and Robinson Rivers, below Tanana Crossing. In his opinion, there was little use "in any gasoline boats trying to make the trip" to the Chisana because of that stretch of bad water."⁵⁰

Despite the fact that the *Reliance* had reached the mouth of the Nabesna and the Chisana, there seemed little use to the company in the boat ascending the Tanana again. Although some people were ascending the Chisana in poling boats from the mouth to the gold discovery--and others were going up the Nabesna River and the Nabesna trail--the townsite of Reliance did not seem to have a great future as an outfitting center. It was not easy to get up the Tanana, and the trail from Gulkana to Chisana on the old Indian portage route was becoming more popular. It was predicted that the Gulkana trail would become the logical route

for stampeders in the coming winter, and one party on the trail was able to use wagons all the way to the head of Platinum Creek in the Nabesna Valley.⁵¹

Interest in the Chisana district was increasing daily, and it was said that the White Pass Railroad might build an extension to the Chisana. J. B. Close, the son of Chairman Close of the White Pass, was on his way into the Chisana to inspect the strike, although no indication was given of a possible railroad route.⁵²

The trip of the *Reliance* was an important one, as it seemed to establish the mouth of the Nabesna and the Chisana Rivers, as the farthest upstream any of the bigger boats could go, at least for the navigation season of 1913. Though the Northern Navigation Company had decided it was not worthwhile to send the *Reliance* up the Tanana River again, the independent steamboat companies, and other boat owners were not giving up. From the middle of August to the middle of September, no less than 14 sternwheelers or gas launches were on their way up the Tanana River, all of them intending to get as close as possible to the Chisana diggings. Among the bigger boats there were the *Tana* (234 tons), the *Samson* (272 tons), the *White Seal* (194 tons), the *Tetlin*, Enlund's sawmill scow, the *Flora*, the *Martha Clow*, the *Mabel*, the *Dan*, the *Marie F.*, the *Elmer G.*, the *Grizzly*, the *S & S*, and the *Shushana*.

The steamer *Tana* carrying a "full load" of freight and passengers, proceeded as far up the Tanana River to the Chisana diggings as the boat could possible get. Captain Langley thought the trip of the *Tana* was "very successful" when "he was able to push his boat to a point within 9 miles of the junction of the Chisana and nabesna rivers, and he put his 90 passengers ashore at that point, all greatly pleased with the treatment that had been accorded them."⁵³

When navigation on the Tanana closed for the year in October, at least six sternwheelers were known to be frozen in on the Upper Tanana River: the *Martha Clow*, the *Tana*, the *White Seal*, the *Florence S.*, the *Samson*, and the *Tetlin*. All of

these boats had been bound for the Chisana. Of these six sternwheelers, only the *Tana*, which had gotten within 9 miles of the mouth of the Nabesna, and the *Tetlin*, which was "hopelessly high and dry on a bar" some distance up the Nabesna River, were able to land their passengers and cargo reasonably near to Reliance City. Despite the fact that relatively few boats had reached the mouth of the Nabesna, by late September there was still a large stock of supplies at Reliance City, left by the passengers on the *Reliance* and other boats.

This freight was hauled up the Chisana River closer to the diggings by several people. The steamer *Marathon*, which was built in Fairbanks by two men, with a steam engine taken from a White Automobile, had "excellent success" on the Chisana River. The *Marathon* made many runs up from Reliance City on the Tanana River, to a spot about 6 miles below the mouth of Scotty Creek on the Chisana called "Gasoline City." It was called Gasoline City "because Tom Dodds reached that far upstream in his motor boat."⁵⁴

Gasoline City was about 40 miles from the hills where gold was discovered, but the stampedeers hoped some gold would be found in the Scotty Creek area.

One of the owners of the steamer *Marathon*, R. E. Leber, explained later that the great metropolis of the lower Chisana had a new name. "Mr. Leber stated last evening that the name of Gasoline City had been changed, and that it was now called Shucklinville, after its most enterprising citizen, Sam Shucklin. Mr. Shucklin freighted all of his goods to the new settlement, which boasts of a population of 150, and everybody seems to be happy. Of the 150 inhabitants two are women who found passage on one of the upriver boats. The settlement is about six miles below the mouth of Scotty Creek. Reliance City is now a deserted settlement, only two people remaining there."⁵⁵

Another boat which ran up the Chisana River to Gasoline City near Scottie Creek was the 40 foot long sternwheeler *Mabel*. The *Mabel* was a gasoline boat

driven by a 15-horsepower engine. The boat was owned by Martin Moran and P. Flannigan of Iditarod, and left Fairbanks on September 1, 1913, carrying a "large outfit" for the owners and their four passengers, Bert Kennedy, Dave Early, Ben Howland, and Otto Moses. The *Mabel* was pushing a forty-foot-long barge, and both the barge and the boat were loaded down with a full and complete winter's outfit for six men."⁵⁶

The *Mabel* first attempted to ascend the Chena Slough above Fairbanks to Thirtymile House, "from which point it will be dragged over the sand, if necessary, into the waters of the Tanana."⁵⁷ However, the Chena River was too low for the *Mabel* to get near the Tanana River, so the little boat descended the Chena to its mouth, and began the long journey up the Tanana and Chisana Rivers to the new goldfields.

Nine months later, in May of 1914, the sternwheeler *Mabel* steamed into Fairbanks from the Chisana. Captain Flannigan estimated that the 40-foot *Mabel* had wintered about sixty miles above the mouth of the Chisana. The Captain said the whole Chisana district could be summed up in four words, "one big dismal failure," but his boat had made one of the most successful trips of the entire stampede.

The *Mabel* and her 40-foot barge had wintered at Gasoline City. The six men on the *Mabel* had used the barge as their winter living quarters. In the fall of 1913 she had made the trip from Fairbanks to Gasoline City in 23 days, which was excellent time considering that it was already the first week of September when she had left Fairbanks, and that the boat had also been pushing a 40-foot barge. The *Mabel* had made it farther upstream than many of the other boats which had left much earlier in the season.⁵⁸

In addition to Reliance City at the mouth of the Chisana, and Gasoline City, at the mouth of Scottie Creek, the stampeders staked a more permanent townsite on

Chathenda Creek, which was variously called Chisana City or Johnson City, and was the major distribution point for the district. The townsite was a mile and a half from the Chisana River, and about seven miles from the original strike. By October of 1913, two avenues were laid out in Johnson City and most of the townsite lots were claimed by stakers. Johnson City was later described as being "quite a town" with nine or ten stores. In 1914, there were for a time 400 people at Johnson City and the townsite consisted of about "150 log cabins scattered along Chathenda Creek," two sawmills, a post office, restaurants, stores, and other structures.⁵⁹

As Reliance City had been located at the head of navigation for large sternwheelers like the *Reliance*, and Gasoline City had been located at the head of navigation for shallower draft vessels like the *Marathon*, the *Mabel* and Tom Dodd's gas boat, so too Johnson City had been located near the head of navigation for poling boats.

Many men in poling boats did ascend the Chisana in 1913 to the mouth of Chathenda Creek, more than 113 miles above the mouth of the Chisana River. It was noted in a USGS report describing the stampede that "under favorable conditions launches may be taken up these rivers (Chisana and Tanana) as far as the north front of the Nutzotin Mountains, and boats were lined or poled all the way up to the mouth of Chathenda Creek."⁶⁰

There is no accurate count of the number of disappointed gold stampedeers who waited for the ice to go out in the spring of 1914 and floated down the river, just as there is no reliable count of the number of people who stampeded to the Chisana in the first place. Though there were reports of several thousand miners in the area, the Geological Survey estimated that not more than 500 or 600 men were in the district at any one time.⁶¹ As often happened in Alaskan gold camps,

the original reports of the wealth of the Chisana were wildly exaggerated. Though there was gold in the Chisana watershed, it was certainly not another Klondike.

It was not only the disappointed gold seekers who were poling their way back to Fairbanks, but also miners who were following rumors of strikes on other streams in the upper Tanana valley, such as the short-lived 1914 stampede to Johnson River. A fake letter telling of a rich gold discovery on Johnson River was posted outside the bunkhouse of Harry Hamshaw, a big mining operator on the Chisana, and it touched off the stampede. One night, 29 men who worked for Hamshaw quit their jobs and started downstream for Johnson River. Many, if not all of them, went by poling boat. One group that joined the fake stampede later told of how they came down the Chisana River, probably putting their boats in the water near the mouth of the Chathenda Creek. "Closing up their affairs in the Chisana as quickly as possible, Compton, Byron Arnold, George Harwood, William Upton, Clarence Atkinson and Jimmy Brennan started for the scene of the new strike. They left Johnson City on the 14th of July, and as the water was very high at that time, the trip down the Chisana River was a perilous one. While near Silent City, on the Chisana River, the men lost their boats and entire outfits. They then picked up another boat and started on again."⁶²

Though some of the men in poling boats carried out valuable furs and any gold they had mined, much of the ore from the Chisana was going out across the mountains from the White River through Skolai Pass to the Copper River drainage, and down to McCarthy on the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad. The trail to McCarthy was far shorter than the difficult boat trip to Fairbanks and by connecting with what was then Alaska's only major standard gauge railroad, passengers or freight could be hauled with ease directly to tidewater. One man who returned from the Chisana in 1914 further explained: "The greater part of the gold from the Chisana is being shipped out to McCarthy and the coast towns. One

reason for this is that the men who are taking out the gold consider the McCarthy route the best to the Chisana, and another one is that the coast towns have boosted consistently for the new camp."⁶³

Yet despite the fact that the shorter transportation route to the Copper River drainage was being utilized more as men became familiar with the area, the Tanana continued to be a major artery for traffic to and from the Chisana district through 1914. The poling boat traffic was in fact so heavy on the Tanana River with miners coming down from the Chisana, that the Commercial Club in Fairbanks suggested putting up a big sign on the Tanana River to let the boatmen know when they were approaching the city. Like an exit sign on an expressway, the marker was supposed to let a boatman know when to get off the river. A year later the Commercial Club finally did erect a sign on the Tanana to alert the boat traffic, a "majestic finger pointing the way to Fairbanks."⁶⁴

The first full year of mining in the Chisana was also the peak year for gold production. In 1914 the miners in the Chisana took out a quarter of a million dollars in gold. The next year it dropped to \$160,000 and by 1916 the yearly production was \$40,000. The richest placer mines were worked out during the first year. Most miners in the Chisana worked with picks and shovels. Because the area was so remote little machinery could be brought in to recover the gold more efficiently.⁶⁵

Anthropologist Robert McKennan, who made an extensive study of the Upper Tanana Indians in 1929, said that the population of Chisana that year was seven people, six men and one woman. McKennan said that despite the small number of people living in the area, Chisana had a monthly mail service from Chitina, an outside contact denied to the rest of the region.⁶⁶ The trader living at Chisana, however, died in the fall of 1929, and the community was no longer even a minor commercial center. As McKennan explained, "With the exception of this small

mining community and two or three white trappers, the resident white population of the upper Tanana consisted of a few fur traders. Up to the fall of 1929 there was one located at Chisana. With his death it became necessary for the Indians of the Chisana and Nabesna basins to trade at the posts on the Copper River, the nearest, that at Slana River, being about 100 miles from Chisana and 60 miles from Nabesna."⁶⁷

Trading posts which predated the Chisana stampede had been established in the upper Tanana by Captain Northway in 1909 and 1910, and by W.H. Newton at the mouth of the Nabesna in 1912. McKennan noted that from 1912 on, there was at least one trading post at the mouth of the Nabesna. For many years the owner of one of the Nabesna trading posts was John Hajdukovich, but there were three other traders at Nabesna in business at the same time including Milo Hajdukovich, a distant cousin of John, Capt. Flannigan, and Herman Kessler.

McKennan summarized the work carried on by the traders in the upper Tanana and evaluated their impact on the Natives:

Two rival traders, Ted Lowell and Milo Hajdukovich, operated stores at Tanana Crossing, Tetlin, and the mouth of the Nabesna. Goods were brought in during the summer in power-driven, shallow draught scows and distributed to these three posts. In the winter the traders drove by dog team to their various stores where the Indians came in to meet them, and on occasion they drove to the more distant camps. During the spring when the Indians were muskrat hunting, the traders journeyed from cap to camp via outboard motors. There was also a trader, Herman Kissler, farther up the Tanana near the mouth of Gardiner Creek, who dealt largely with the Scottie creek band...Since considerable credit was extended, the natives enjoyed taking advantage of the rivalry between the white men and became very shrewd in playing one against the other. The Natives received good

prices for their skins, but they were paid in trade and prices for goods were high. Such trade contacts had naturally altered the native economy profoundly, with the result that canvas tents, sheet-iron stoves, cloth clothing, modern rifles, etc., had displaced their Native counterparts. To a certain extent, however, such influence was largely superficial. The difficulties of transportation favored small, expensive articles such as clothing, beads, or the like rather than bulky items such as flour; thus it was much more profitable for the trader to handle expensive luxuries such as portable phonographs or ladies rayon bloomers than the bulkier and cheaper goods ordinarily regarded as necessities of life.⁶⁸

With the construction of the Alaska Highway during World War II, the "natural route" into the Interior of Alaska was finally utilized as a transportation corridor, from the Canadian border down the Chisana Valley to the Tanana Valley and Richardson Highway. The Alcan was the first overland connection between Alaska and the contiguous United States. The highway greatly increased access to the Chisana and its right bank tributaries below Scottie Creek. On the upper river, however, the highway had much less effect. In the early 1940s, shortly before the Alaska Highway was completed, geologist Fred Moffit noted that "a trail from Chisana down the Chisana River was formerly in use, but has been traveled so little in recent years that it is now almost obliterated."⁶⁹

FOOTNOTES

1. Alfred Hulse Brooks, USGS Bulletin #284 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905), p. 12.
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3. U.S. Congress, Senate, 49C., 2S., Senate Ex. Document 125, Henry T. Allen, *Report of an Expedition to the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk Rivers, in the Territory of Alaska in the Year 1885* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887).
4. Moffit, *Geology of the Nutzotin Mountains*, p. 109.
5. F.H. Moffit and Adolph Knopf, *Mineral Resources of the Nabesna-White River District, Alaska*, USGS Bulletin #417 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910), p. 13.
6. C.W. Hayes, "An Expedition Through the Yukon District," *National Geographic Magazine* 4 (May 15, 1892): 117-159.
7. Alfred Hulse Brooks, *A Reconnaissance in the Tanana and White River Basins, Alaska, 1898*, 20th Annual Report of the USGS, Part 7 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), p. 438.
8. Ibid., p. 434.
9. Ibid., p. 435.
10. Ibid., pp. 449-450.
11. Moffit, *Geology of the Nutzotin Mountain*, p. 108.
12. Alfred Hulse Brooks, *A Reconnaissance from Pyramid Harbor to Eagle City, Alaska*, 21st Annual Report of the USGS, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), pp. 331-391, 384.
13. Oscar Rohn, *A Reconnaissance of the Chitina River and the Skolai Mountains, Alaska*, 21st Annual Report of the USGS, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), pp. 393-440.

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15. W.C. Mendenhall and F.C. Schrader, *The Mineral Resources of the Mount Wrangell District, Alaska*, USGS Professional Paper 15 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), p. 12.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
17. Moffit and Knopf, *Mineral Resources of the Nabesna-White River District*, p. 15.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
20. Stephen R. Capps, *The Chisana-White River District*, USGS Bulletin #630 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 22.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
23. Moffit, *Geology of the Nutzotin Mountains*, p. 200; Capps, *The Chisana-White River District*, p. 22.
24. *Fairbanks Daily Times*, June 18, 1913.
25. *Ibid.*, July 26, 1913.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, July 12, 1913.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, July 27, 1913.
34. *Ibid.*, July 12, 1913.
35. *Ibid.*, July 13, 15, 1913.
36. *Ibid.*, July 13, 1913.

37. Ibid., July 22, 1913.
38. Ibid., August 22, July 24, 22, 1913.
39. Ibid., July 20, 25, 1913.
40. Ibid., July 13, 29, 27, 1913.
41. Ibid., July 29, 30, 29, 1913.
42. Ibid., July 30, 1913.
43. Ibid., August 1, 2, 6, 1913.
44. Ibid., August 7, 1913.
45. Ibid., August 9, 1913.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., August 13, 1913.
48. Ibid., August 12, 1913.
49. Ibid., August 19, 1913.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., August 28, 15, 1913.
52. Ibid., August 19, 1913.
53. Ibid., September 25, 1913.
54. Ibid., October 8, 1913.
55. Ibid., October 14, 1913.
56. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, September 1, 1913.
57. *Fairbanks Daily Times*, September 2, 1913.
58. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, May 19, 1914.
59. Ibid., June 1, 1914; *Fairbanks Daily Times*, May 19, 1914; Capps, *The Chisana-White River District*, p. 22.
60. Ibid., p. 27.
61. Ibid., p. 22.
62. *Fairbanks Daily Times*, August 6, 1914.

63. Ibid., May 20, August 5, 1914.
64. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, May 27, 1915.
65. Capps, *The Chisana-White River District*, p. 94.
66. Robert Addison McKennan, *The Upper Tanana Indians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 26.
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68. Ibid., pp. 26-27.
69. Moffit, *Geology of the Nutzotin Mountains*, p. 110.

Report of
1st Lieutenant Stuart A. Howard, 30th Infantry
upon the
CHISANA RIVER EXPLORING EXPEDITION.

Aug. 14th, -Sept. 24th, 1913.

1. The Expedition composed of 1st Lieut. S.A. Howard, 30th Infantry, Commanding, Corporal Robert Edmison, Co. "G" 30th Inftry., Private Charles O'Neal, Co. "G" 30th Infantry, and Homer E. Olts, Packer, Q.M., left Fort Liscum, Alaska at 7 A.M. Aug., 14th 1913, pursuant to S.O. #56 Hqrs. Ft. Liscum, Alaska, and letter of instructions dated Aug. 13th 1913, Hqrs. Ft. Liscum, Alaska.
2. The Equipment consisted of 6 horses, one 4 line Army Wagon, one Army Buckboard, and 6 pack outfits complete, Abercrombie pack saddles. The original intention was to proceed with the wagon and buckboard to Gulkana along the Government road, and leaving the wagon and buckboard at the telegraph station at Gulkana, packing in from this latter place.
3. Upon arrival at Gulkana, this plan was changed, due to information received from parties returning from the Gold fields and who stated that wheeled vehicles could be taken in as far as Chistochina. It was then decided to take the wagons in from Gulkana as far as possible and cache them along the trail at some convenient point to await our return. By taking the wagons along, we could carry in a greater amount of supplies, and, what was of greater importance, grain for the animals.

ROUTES OF TRAVEL INTO THE CHISANA COUNTRY.

4. There are six different routes into the Chisana Valley, viz.
 - (1) From Valdez or Chitina via the government trail to Gulkana thence via the Eagle trail to the Slana River, then via Batzulnetas, Platinum Creek, Nabesna Valley, Cooper Pass, and Notch Creek.
 - (2) From McCarthy via Chitistone Pass, Scolai Glacier and Pass, Solo Creek and Gehoenda Creek.
 - (3) From Fairbanks via Paxons and the Chistochina River to the Slana River, thence via Batzulnetas as in Route 1.
 - (4) From Fairbanks by steamboat via the Tanana River to the Mouth of the Nabesna River, thence by packing over Cooper Pass into the Chisana Valley.
 - (5) From Dawson, Yukon Territory, via the White River, Solo Creek, and Gehoenda Creek.
 - (6) From Dawson, Yukon Territory, via Beyer Creek and Chathena Creek.
 - (7) From McCarthy via the Mizina and Chisana Glaciers.

Source: 015.321.93/1913, Sailing of Steamers, Record Group 70, National Archives.

5. Route (1), was taken by the Expedition both in going and returning, and is shown in sketch herewith appended and marked A.

Its distance from Valdez to Gulkana is 130 miles; from Gulkana to the Slana River 66 Miles, and from the Slana River to Hazelet, Chisana, 88 Miles, making the total distance from Valdez to Hazelet, 284 Miles.

As far North as Gulkana it follows the Government road which is generally good. From Gulkana to the Slana River the trail is generally bad in August and much more dry and better in September. It is, generally speaking, a long stretch of marsh and bunch grass, with short intervals of good, hard trail. The marshy part is especially hard on pack animals, and they should not be loaded heavier than 200 lbs. each. In some places it is easy for an animal to mire, and they appear to become panic stricken, plunging through and sidling off toward the timber edges in search of hard ground, only to find soft moss and peat which yields to a depth of 6 or 8 inches. The continual moisture softens the animals hoofs and renders easy the loss of horse shoes. Two extra fitted shoes per animal one front and one rear, should be carried along, with the necessary nails. The difficulties of summer travel, especially on grass feed, necessarily limit the packing weight and make winter travel much less expensive.

From the Slana River to Batzulnetas the trail is good, and from Batzulnetas to the head of Platinum Creek it is very bad. Along Platinum Creek the trail is good, alternating between the Creek bars and the woods along the edges. From the Indian village at Nabesna to Cooper Creek the trail is good for one mile out of the village and then very bad. Up Cooper Creek the travel is along the bars and very hard on stock without shoes. The trail divides $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles up Cooper Creek and the left or North Pass is preferable in the summer. It is about 4 miles shorter, a good trail, and no glaciers. It has the disadvantage however of a rise in one place of 700 or 800 feet in 1200 yards, and also a dangerous trail around the large lake, especially after a snow fall.

The south Cooper Pass has a slightly higher summit but it is approached gradually from either end. It has no trail but is traversed on the creek bars. There are several small glaciers to cross, which make it hard on stock. With the summit marked it is probably the better winter trail, because of the easy grades.

After leaving Cooper Pass the trail follows the bar down Notch Creek and across Cross Creek into the timber at the Chisana Indian Village on the spur north of Euchre Mt. From the Indian Village to the Chisana Bar there are three miles of excellent trail. Across the Chisana Bar there is another 3 mile stretch across 29 channels of the Chisana River. $1\frac{1}{2}$ Miles further up the dry bar of Johnston Creek is the site of the new town of Hazelet.

5 Cont'd. On this trail there are several large rivers to cross and numerous creeks. The rivers are mostly glacier streams and are the Gakona, Chistochina, Slana, Nabesna and Chisana. In the Summer the best time of crossing is about 8 A.M. as they are at their lowest at that time. They are full of air holes and quick sand but can be crossed readily by following the ripples. The trail has been gone over so much now (Sept. 20th) that the safe crossings can be found without difficulty. The greatest depths were in the Chistochina and Nabesna Rivers, and were about belly deep on a horse (Aug. 22nd and 27th) By Sept 15th the waters appeared to have fallen about a foot.

There is good horse feed in August practically along the entire route, consisting of red top and bunch grass but Sept. 15th is probably the latest that it can be depended upon. There is plenty of small game for dog feed. Anticipating the winter travel, there are two new road houses going up along this route; at Tulsona and Indian River (15 Miles East of Chistochina) and reported that road houses are to be built at the Slana River and at Nabesna.

6. Route (2), from McCarthy via Scolai Pass was taken by the majority of the prospectors; principally because of its short distance, and because of railroad transportation from Cordova to McCarthy. The distance from McCarthy to Hazelet is 100 miles. This route has two approaches to Russell Glacier; via Nizina River which is deep and swift and has to be crossed 4 times, and via the Chitistone Pass a dangerous goat trail along a gravel bank 1000 feet above the river.

Four animals were lost off this trail up to Sept 10th.

This McCarthy route has all the dangers of glacier travel and swift rivers; but has the shorter distance to recommend it.

Across Russell Glacier is about 16 miles between willows, and from timber to timber about 35 Miles.

About 8 or 10 miles over Sour Dough hill the trail is marshy. The railroad company has done some work on Sour Dough hill and on the Chitistone trail.

If the Chitistone trail were widened and improved and the glacier marked, the McCarthy route can be recommended as the better route for June, July and August.

7. Route (3) is the land route to Chisana from Fairbanks and the North, and cuts through to the East from Paxon's via Slate Creek and Chistochina; going in from Chistochina the same as in Route (1). A Great many people from Fairbanks preferred this route to the River Route.

8. Route (4) up the Tanana River By steamboat from Fairbanks to the mouth of the Nabesna, thence by pack up the Nabesna to Cooper Creek and Cooper Pass to Chisana. The boats have gone as far as the mouth of the Chisana, but the Canon on the lower Chisana makes travel up the Chisana difficult and impracticable.
9. Route (5) from Dawson was taken by many and is principally a water route up the White River. The banks are very marshy and land travel in summer is difficult.

Route (6) from Dawson was used by a few and is shorter than route (5).

Route (7) as a winter route, would cut off about 35 miles of the distance from McCarthy to Chisana, but there would be a 40 mile Glacier trip without timber which would be impracticable. Besides, there would also be the dangers incident to winter glacier travel.

TOWN SITE.

10. The town site of the district will undoubtedly be located at the junction of the trails to McCarthy, Nabesna and to Wilson Creek.

It will probably be called either Hazeletville or Chisana. Mr. George Hazelet staked a homestead for a town site and two prospectors staked placer claims over the townsite and invited the camp to build cabins. On September 7th, I counted eighteen cabins up and probably ten or twelve more building. I was informed that there were 40 cabins in the vicinity. The site is $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles up the old Johnston Creek bar from the Chisana River.

Scattered along Wilson Creek on the various claims there are about 10 cabins. On Sept. 7th the U.S. Commissioner was located on Wilson Creek at the mouth of Big Eldorado. He stated that he would probably locate the office over at Hazelet. On the wooded bar near the Commissioner were located several tents and cabins.

There is no chance for a townsite at the mouth of Wilson as it is too far out of the way.

About 300 people are located on the several creeks but they appear to be concentrating at Hazelet because of the start already made there and because of the large timber, suitable for logs and whip sawing lumber.

More people are arriving continually and by Christmas time a conservative estimate would place the population at about six hundred.

CONDITIONS AT CHISANA.

11. I observed no conditions of suffering or hardship. All in the Camp appeared to be supplied with enough food to last until the blading permitted food to be brought in the diggings. There is plenty of Mountain sheep and small game.

11 cont'd. Those reported as having little or no food were probably gone, at the date of my arrival, Aug. 30th.

Everybody appeared to have money and expected to pay high prices for "grub".

Food was \$1.00 per lb. then went down to .50¢ and back to 1.00.

Two large pack trains came in with supplies during my stay. One of 17 animals, was going back via McCarthy to bring in one more load before snow.

There was no evidence of violence or lawlessness. In fact conditions seemed quite the reverse, very peaceful; every man determined and going about his own business. I found good feeling and good nature everywhere I went.

12. There is plenty of timber on all creeks and that at Hazelet is quite large and very suitable for Cabin construction. A story and a half road house is finished at Hazelet.

All seem to be putting up cabins on "squatter rights".

A great many partners are out after dogs and "grub", while the others remain and build cabins etc. Whip saw lumber, get in fire wood.

There is no horse feed on East side of river, where practically all the staking has been done. There is good horse feed on the West side between the Indian village and the Chisana bar. The food is red top and bunch grass. The limiting time for horse feed is Sept 15th.

At the time of my departure it appeared that all horses left in diggings will probably be Killed for dog feed. Several were already killed at Hazelet on Sept. 7th.

The Camp is known as a winter camp, the benches being frozen. As soon as sledding begins food will be plentiful and boilers gotten into the country. A great deal of prospecting will then be done and the future of the Camp will be known by March 1st.

13. The only claims working are on Bonanza, Little Eldorado, Big Eldorado and Glacier, about 7 Claims in all.

The ones showing most work are James' and Whittam's. Method, sluice boxes. At the mouth of the Big Eldorado a dam has been built for sluicing. The remaining claims are merely staked and not over half are located.

Shafts dug now on the creeks, fill up with water about 4 or 5 feet down; those dug on the benches strike frozen ground.

Bed rock on Bonanza and Little Eldorado is from 2 to 6 feet. On benches unknown.

The gold on Bonanza and Little Eldorado is coarse and flaky.

The country is typical placer country, ground down smoothly, except along the creek canons. Bonanza Creek runs through a canon about 30 feet wide at the bottom and about 2000 feet high. Porphyry and slate, with country rock on the high slopes. Bonanza and little Eldorado Creeks are above timber line.

The vicinity appears to be pretty well staked. There are many fractional claims.

The only staking I observed on the West side of the Chisana river was Long Chance Creek, N.W. of Buchre Mt.

One woman, Mrs. Isaacs, in Camp. I met another on Notch Creek, coming out.

There was no saw mill, nor wireless, nor liquor saloons in Chisana, on Sept. 7th.

A pack train from the Kennicott Mines came in to the diggings Sept. 3rd. ✓

Mr. Hamshaw has staked considerably, and has posted several water notices, one 1000 and one 1800 Miners inches.

14. It is reported that Mr. James was shown discovery by some Indians. He told me that this was true in the Summer of 1912 but that he came back in May 1913 and found gold at the mouth of Bonanza. Carl Whittam was present at the time and he and James staked as much as possible. It is said that one of James partners told friends in Dawson of the strike, thus causing the opening up of the country.

It was reported that steamboats from Fairbanks brought plenty of supplies up the Tanana to the mouth of the Nabesna but this was not verified. One party went down to investigate but could find nothing.

One man and several packs have been lost in the Chistochina river, and reports state that 4 have been drowned in the Chitistone via McCarthy. One man was lost 2 days on Scolai glacier, but was found nearly starved.

U.S., OR WAR DEPT., CALLED UPON. ✓

15. There is no present necessity for any assistance from the U.S. or the War Department.

There should be a Deputy Marshall present, the same as at any other community of 300 or 400 men. Also a customs inspector, as there appears to be evidence of supplies taken across the border from Canada.

There was no doctor in the camp up to Sept. 8th.

There is need of telegraphic communication, and of a U.S. Mail Service.

A wire can easily be run in from Cobb Lake tapping the old telegraph wire from Gulkana to Eagle.

VIOLETION OF CACHES; CLAIM JUMPING?, etc.

16. There is no authentic evidence of violation of caches at Chisana. Only 2 cases came under my notice and after much inquiry. One at Cobb Lake 85 miles away and the other at Tulsona 125 miles from Chisana.

There is heresay evidence that a lawyer from Chitina found that one of James Claims was not legally staked or recorded; so he staked over it himself, a sort of legal jumping.

Otherwise there appears to be great respect for the rights of others.

A great deal of staking was done in June, and if not recorded, or represented by assessment work, they will run out in September and will probably be jumped.

INCIDENTS OF THE EXPEDITION.

17. The Army Wagon with the expedition fell over a thirty foot embankment on the Eagle trail, three miles East of Gulkana. The wagon tread was 6 inches wider than the usual mountain wagons used on these roads, and had difficulty in several places before it overturned. Packer Olts was driving, and in making a sharp turn his lead horses pulled him out too far, overturning the wagon. The men, animals and front wheels remained on the road, the coupling pole fortunately breaking. The wagon caught on a small bench thirty feet below the road and remained there until our return, September 18th, when we hauled it into the telegraph station at Gulkana. It was too badly damaged to repair, one rear wheel being crushed, seat broken, the rear axle bent, and the break rods bent and twisted.

The cargo was not damaged so we made up the packs and packed in with 4 animals and continued with the other 2 on the buckboard as far as Tulsona, 20 miles.

At Tulsona we cached the buckboard until our return.

SUMMARY

18. (a) Summer route; via McCarthy for June, July and August.
- (b) Winter route; via Gulkana, Chistockina, Batzuletnas, Jack creek, Habesna, Copper Pass (south) and Notch Creek, or from Copper Center or Chitina, on the ice up the Copper River, Tanada Creek, Jack Creek etc.
- (c) Town site; at Hazelet, on Johnson Creek.
- (d) Condition of settlers, Satisfactory.

(e) Prospect of Assistance from War Dept., assistance not necessary.

(f) Two authentic cases of violation of caches; these 85 and 125 miles from Chisana.

(g) No claim jumping, nor conflict of authority.

S. A. Howard

1st Lieut. 30th Infantry,
Commanding.

*Subject seen
10/10
11/10*

1st Ind.

Hq. Fort Liscum, Alaska, Oct. 2nd 1913. ** To the Commanding General, Western Department. The discovery of gold has caused a great stampede into this region. Lieut. Howard performed a difficult task in a very creditable manner and the information contained herein as regards to the conditions there as they now exist, and the routes of travel may be of future interest and use to the Commanding General.

(sgd) J.P. O'NEIL.

5 inclosures

Lieut.Col. 30th Infantry,
Commanding.