

Historic Narrative of Trails from Kern Creek to Knik



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Cover: H.G. Kaiser photo, November 25, 1917. View of AEC Railway running across Turnagain Arm tide flats between miles 83-84. Snow slide, mountains on right. AMRC-aec-h4-h5pan. Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

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Introduction

The proposed state funded project would replace signs in existing locations and add new signs of increased size intended to give drivers more time to perceive the signs and decide how to respond, e.g. more warning for recreational locations, highway turnoffs. A historic property listed in the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) files as the Girdwood-Ship Creek Connecting Trail (SEW-0257) is depicted as going through the project vicinity connecting Girdwood and Indian. The property is addressed in a report for a previous project (CRC 2009).

The Girdwood-Ship Creek Connecting Trail (SEW-0257) is listed as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as a connecting route of the historic Iditarod Trail. The trail is depicted in the AHRS files on a path that is not reflective of its likely historic route. An initial overland route connected the Portage Valley to Knik via Crow Pass and Eagle River. Later some traffic continued past Glacier Creek (later Girdwood) along the partly cleared right of way of the Alaska Central Railway to Indian Creek, then over that pass to Ship Creek. The trail over Crow Pass was improved by the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) in 1908 and became Alaska Road Commission Route 19 from end of track at Kern Creek to Knik. The route via Indian was not improved and despite better grades was less preferred as a route.

Completion of the railroad ended use of the right of way between Girdwood and Indian for dog and horse powered travel along the arm for reasons of safety, cost, convenience and speed. In 1923 Route 19 became the Crow Pass Highway and was improved to a wagon road by the Bureau of Public Roads but beyond the mines was formally abandoned.

This paper establishes the period of significance, character defining features, and eligibility for listing on the NRHP for the trail section between Girdwood and Indian on Turnagain Arm, Alaska.

Prehistory

Passage by Alaska Natives through Turnagain Arm was by land, ice and water. Known archaeological sites include sites and isolated finds along the shores where marine mammals might have been harvested and on the slopes above, where hunters likely sought mountain goats and sheep as part of their seasonal round of subsistence activities. Beluga Point is the location of a well-stratified site with distinctive separation of stone tool styles over time but few well-associated absolute dates from radiocarbon or other means that would definitively tie the occupation sequence to calendar time (Reger and Boraas 1996). A sequence of distinct material culture traditions left evidence at Beluga Point and likely other locations that contrast to the Yuit-like cultures that continued to reside on the Prince William Sound side of the Portage Divide from the later Dené culture traditions that supplant that technology in the same sites (e.g., Workman 1996; Dixon 2003).

Conflicts over use of the Turnagain Arm area between the Suk and the Dené were recounted by Shem Pete and others (Kari and Fall 2003). Place names nearby attest to the conflicts and tie into stories about military victories and losses sustained by those on both sides. Campbell Point has a Dené name, *Ulchena Huch'ilyut*, “where we pulled up the Alutiiqs’ umiak.” Nearby the ridge above Potter was named *Ulchena Tich'qiluqt*, “where we killed Allutiiq people,” was another location named for conflict with Alutiiq people from Prince William Sound (Kari and Fall 2003). Indian Creek was named *Nuti Edileni*, “that which flows into salt water.” It was a location used as recently as the 1930s as a place for hunting porcupines, sheep and salmon. “In 1918 all the Natives from Knik, Tyonek and Kenai used to hang out there.” (ibid.). Portage Pass at the head of the inlet was named *Ulchena Hch'aqedelt*, “where the Alutiiqs came out,” where an Alutiiq war party brought their *umiaq* to Turnagain Arm en route to their target village. Alaska Native peoples used and continue to use these areas but left little evidence of their passage in the form of improved overland trails. Knik included many Dena’ina residential localities in the vicinity of the mouth of the Knik River (Mielke 2023; Fall and Kari 2003). Other camps and localities were recalled by Shem Pete and others but none specifically in the project area (Fall and Kari 2003).

Contact

Sustained direct contact with European peoples began with the late 18th century arrival of independent fur trading companies to Cook Inlet (Solovjova and Vovnyanko 2002). Competing companies established posts on the Kenai Peninsula where prolonged, direct interaction through trade took place. Other posts were established at locations including Knik Arm where fur traders sought peltry from the Dena’ina and Ahtna. Little physical evidence of this history is known to exist in Turnagain Arm. This pattern continues through the brief British presence, when Captains Cook and Vancouver made exploratory forays into the inlet. Imperial Russia needed sea otter peltry for its exclusive trade with China and pursued that species to the end of South America and near-extinction (e.g. Ravalli 2021; Bockstoe 2009).

After sea otters were depleted in Cook Inlet, the Russian fur trade expanded to Knik Arm for land peltry including beaver. Intercepting the indigenous fur trade from the Copper Basin and the Tanana River was part of the strategy to increase profits, and efforts were made to explore and establish posts in the interior but rebuffed (Znamenski 2003; Zagoskin 1967). Russia sought other resources, including ice, bricks, coal, lumber seals, and walrus hides, to fund the colony. Pavel Doroshin, a mining engineer employed by the Russian America Company, located gold deposits up the Kenai River in 1840 on Cooper Creek, but is not known to have reached Turnagain Arm. Legend held that Russian diggings existed on Bear Creek and other locations and that miners had found tools and other evidence that the Russians had mined there (Moffitt 1905).

American purchase of Alaska in 1867 had no immediate effect in Turnagain Arm. Fur trade at existing posts continued, including Knik and Susitna Station (Mielke 2023). The first major change was the arrival of fish salteries and canneries which boomed in the

1880s as the industry waned along the coast in California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. At the same time gold was discovered at Juneau, Alaska, leading to a new rush up the coast. The nearest fish packing plants were at Ladd Landing across Cook Inlet and the mouth of the Kenai River; no such facilities were built on Turnagain Arm (e.g., Rich and Ball 1931). The canneries became bases for prospectors, big game and commercial hunters to access the interior of the Kenai Peninsula and other areas in Cook Inlet (e.g. Kidder 1904, Scull 1915). Turnagain Arm continued to be of minor interest until discovery of gold at Bear Creek spurred a gold rush in 1896 (Barry 1973).

Cook Inlet Gold Rush

The Turnagain Arm mining district first boomed in 1896 (Moffitt 1905), though Joseph Cooper found gold in the interior of the Kenai Peninsula in the 1880s (Cook and Norris 1998). The rush of prospectors to the area saw the rapid establishment of overland trails from Prince William Sound fjords including Resurrection Bay and Passage Canal to Turnagain Arm and the Kenai and Chugach mountains. Existing ports on Cook Inlet included Knik, Tyonek, Kenai, and Seldovia, with ocean going vessels limited to the inlet proper and smaller boats transporting people and supplies from these landings to shallow water ports at Susitna Station, Sunrise, Hope, Indian and Glacier Creek (later renamed Girdwood) (ibid). The Johnston & Herning map shows no trails overland from Turnagain Arm to Knik in 1899 (Johnston & Herning 1899). Mielke (2023) notes that Dena'ina men were hired to carry mail and packages over land from Knik to Sunrise and Hope, and a few owned boats which they used for the same purpose.

Gold Rushes are a social and economic phenomena responsible for European colonization of North America in periodic episodes. The late 19th century gold rushes were spurred by the economic contractions of the Panic of 1893, which had severe effects on the nascent economy of the Pacific Northwest (Pierce 1994). Repercussions of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and its revocation caused the boom and collapse of silver mines in the American West, which never returned to the levels of production seen when the federal government had to purchase silver to back the currency (ibid.). Wages collapsed as businesses and financial institutions could not repay debts and the extractive economy of the Pacific Northwest fell with it. Investment capital sought other outlets and people were easily convinced that riches in the form of precious metals lay waiting in the gravels of Alaska (Sacramento Daily Record-Union 1897).

The mountains of the Northern Kenai Peninsula were quickly explored for minerals and became a destination for gold seekers. Those gold seekers needed paths to follow, lands to claim and supplies to support mining. Turnagain Arm became a mining district of note on the Pacific and a recurrent destination for prospectors, miners and the retinue of people who followed such rushes (Morse 2003; Bruder 2002). The joint U.S.G.S and Army expeditions, guided and supported by local Dené, explored and documented the Kenai Mountains and Turnagain Arm areas beginning in 1899 (Mendenhall 1900; Moffitt 1905; Moffitt and Stone 1906).

Mendenhall described two routes over the Chugach from Turnagain Arm to Knik Arm:

Between Knik and Turnagain Arms

During the winter months communication by water between these two branches of Cook Inlet is out of the question, because of the floating ice which makes navigation so very hazardous, but there are at least two routes by land which may be used. One, much the shortest, easiest and best known, is by way of the small stream called Indian Creek, which enters Turnagain Arm at the mouth of Bird Creek, nearly opposite Sunrise. The divide at the head of this stream is reported to be but 1,200 feet above tide and easy of approach. Knik Arm is reached some distance below the mouth of Yukla Creek (Eagle River), within a total distance of 25 or 30 miles from Turnagain Arm.

Another route, followed by the writer in company with Mr. Kelly this summer, is by way of Glacier and Yukla creeks, and appears on the general map of the season's routes. The divide stands at 3,750 feet above tide, and is reached only by rather difficult climbs over rubble slopes, which give uncertain footing. This route appears not to have been known before, and although starting from near the head of Turnagain Arm will probably not be much used except by prospectors who may wish to reach Raven Creek or other of the upper tributaries of the Yukla, from Sunrise. A pack trail could be constructed over it, but not without considerable outlay (Mendenhall 1900).

Indian Pass was mentioned as superior but the route taken was by Crow Pass. Mendenhall described passing "Indian hunting shacks" and following ephemeral trails—"Now and again we would find an old Indian or game trail, only to have it fade away within a mile." (Mendenhall 1900). Yukla Creek is today's Eagle River; the Indian Pass route reaches Ship Creek. Mendenhall mapped the entire route to the Tanana River (Mendenhall 1900 Plate 16) at a coarse scale.

USGS geologists conducted a number of additional surveys of the project vicinity to assess the mineral resources. The first detailed map of the project vicinity was Moffitt's 1906 map, surveyed in 1904 (Figure 1). This showed a dotted line trail up Glacier Creek but no overland connections or end points.

Logging was an early pursuit on the north side of Turnagain Arm with portable sawmills set up at creek mouths to supply cut lumber to miners and later the railroads. Homesteads and camps were developed including one named for mine entrepreneur James Girdwood who sought gold on Crow Creek (Seward Gateway 1915c; 1906e; USS 763). Use of homestead and mining laws to secure timber lands was an issue for the Forest Service (Langille 1904) as there were a number of controversies regarding land occupation, resource extraction and forest management. Hemlock and spruce were harvested for mine timbers, railroad ties, poles, firewood and building construction. Trails were developed to allow horses to access the interior and drag the saw logs from where they were felled, sometimes miles from the coast, to the sawmills near the

beaches. The Forest Service “cruised” several of these drainages to inventory commercially harvestable timber and establish prices for the timber harvested (e.g. McCullagh 1914; Williams 1925). The forest issued permits for the railroad to continue to harvest timber within five miles of the railroad centerline.

The Turnagain Rush declined relatively quickly as producing streams were claimed up. The Klondike Gold Rush followed the next year, and many miners sought new routes overland to the Yukon drainage. Some seekers returned to Cook Inlet as the hype over Yukon properties was moderated by British efforts to regulate the rush and land was quickly claimed up (Morse 2003). Other rushes followed in quick succession on the Yukon River drainages leading to mass movements to Nome, Fairbanks, Ruby and ever more remote locations accessible by steamboat or dog sled.

Placer and hard rock gold deposits were found on the north side of Turnagain Arm in Crow, Bird and Indian creeks. William and James Girdwood mined placer gold beginning in the 1890s and established a “homestead” that was subdivided into lots hosting saloons, stores, restaurants and hotels later denied by the courts (Seward Gateway 1915c). John Sheridan reportedly traced placer gold to a quartz vein on Crow Creek in 1907 (Seward Weekly Gateway 1907). Others mined placer deposits on Bird, Indian and Rainbow creeks while looking for source lodes.

A gold rush pattern of development was asserted by government officials, railroad boosters and newspaper editors that the rushes would quickly deplete placer gold as prospectors followed the trail of fine gold to the originating quartz deposits, which would require organized capital to develop into lode mines around which communities would grow (Hubbard 1912; Burr 1919). Gold, silver and copper mining had followed this pattern in California, Montana, Nevada and other mineral rich Western states, frequently leaving behind ghost towns but sometimes stable communities. This pattern would civilize the mineral extraction from unruly bands of prospectors chasing placer claims to respectable hard rock mines run by East Coast capitalists with professional mining engineers and professional miners with families.

Access to Sunrise and Hope, the main towns resulting from the rush, was limited by seasonal ice in Cook Inlet and the hazardous bore tide of Turnagain Arm (e.g. Browne 1913). Mining activity quickly spread into the Kenai Mountains as well as into the Chugach Mountains. James Girdwood was reported as arriving late in 1902 to a claim on Crow Creek he shared interests in with partners. The visit was in preparation for investments including flume, lumber, derrick and sawmill to support hydraulic placer mining (Nome Nugget 1902). Other miners were selling their equipment, heading to the next booming district or concocting schemes to market mines to Outside investors (Seward Weekly Gateway 1906).

Alaska Central Railway

The Alaska Central Railway Company proposed in 1902 to construct a railroad to the Yukon River based on surveys conducted in 1900 and 1901 by John Ballaine (Seward

Daily Gateway 1923). Ballaine sent out seven crews of engineers under C.M. Anderson to survey a final route from Resurrection Bay to the Tanana River (ibid). The first construction crews were landed August 28th, 1903, when Ballaine bought the Lowell homestead in exchange for \$4,000 and 32 lots in the newly surveyed Seward townsite. Construction proceeded rapidly with the railroad reaching mile 54 before coal leases were frozen in the Matanuska Valley and capital dried up.

Major construction funding through capital markets dried up with the financial misfortunes of other railroads in the United States, which caused a series of panics which discouraged investment in railroads. The Panic of 1893 expanded out in its effects and continued to have effects on regional economies after 1897 (Caldbeck 2019). The arrival of Klondike gold in 1897 and the economic stimulus of other gold strikes in Alaska, including the Cook Inlet strikes, helped Seattle rebound and as that capital accrued its owners sought investments that would cement their gains. Railroads despite their history of failure and corruption in the Gilded Age (e.g. White 2011, Noyes 1909, Partington 1929) were attractive investments to people like John Ballaine and his backers.

In January 1906 the Seward Gateway published an article describing the routes then currently in use and the promise of better trails along the railroad as construction progressed:

Far in advance of actual railroad building trails have been made by the construction officials to facilitate the transportation of men and supplies for the work of locating and grading the line. To a certain extent old trails have been used, some have been made more easily passable and new ones or short cuts have been made. These trails are of advantage to the ordinary traveler as well as to railroad men and make trips to the interior easier and safer than ever before (Seward Gateway 1906a).

Citing the railroad manager W.B. Poland the route is described as follows:

From 75 to Indian creek on Mile 80, is a trail which a footman can use but it is very bad for sleds, even dogsleds. It runs along the beach and through the woods and the beaches are bare in many places. This makes sled traveling very slow and toilsome, as it is a hard task to drag a loaded sled over the rocky beaches, and the hills occasionally encountered are very rough (Seward Gateway 1906a).

Poland goes on regarding trails to Knik:

From Indian Creek to the head of Knik Arm, sixty miles, there are two trails. One of these runs along the north shore of Turnagain Arm to Campbell point, on Mile 105, which is the end of the land barrier between Turnagain and Knik Arms; from there it follows the railroad survey near eastern shore of Knik Arm to the head of that estuary. From Indian creek

to Campbell Point the trail is available only for foot travelers, being impassable even for dogsleds. ...

The other trail from Indian creek to Knik Arm runs up Indian creek valley and over the divide to Eagle River valley (sic-Ship Creek); thence down that valley until it merges in the beach trail

The old Crow creek trail is still available. It turns off at the mouth of Glacier creek on mile 75, and runs up that creek and its tributary, Crow Creek, to the divide; thence over to Eagle Valley. The trouble with this trail is that it is very steep near the summit and the snow slides are dangerous. It is unsafe for one man to travel it alone. On this trail it is ten miles from timber to timber (Seward Gateway 1906a).

An adjacent article indicates that the company proposed to have 2,000 men working between MP 75 and 105, Girdwood to Campbell Point. After a summer of work by P. Welch & Co., contractors for the railroad, the trail was improved. A 1906 Seward Gateway article summarized railroad grade conditions on August 18, 1906:

Real progress can be made on railroad construction after the track is extended through the last tunnel at the end of mile 53. From 54 to 67 nearly all the heavy work is done and beyond that mile much of the most difficult rock cutting is finished as far as Rainbow creek on mile 94 (Seward Gateway 1906b).

This indicates that there was a cleared, grubbed right of way as far as Rainbow, perhaps with other improvements such as rock cuts, fills, trestles and bridges. The route would be suitable for winter travel by dog sled. The article goes on:

Beyond 67 is a trestle 6600 feet long, between high and low tide. Then the line follows the hills just above high tide nearly all the way to Campbell Point. Much grading there is already done and the remaining task is not so difficult as is generally supposed (Seward Gateway 1906b).

The remaining stretch of grade between Rainbow and Campbell Point would be a greater challenge than anticipated by the article's authors.

The work along Turnagain Arm from mile 68 to 105 will be very similar to that along Kenai and Trail lakes. To make the grade the sloping hills will be cut away, following the winding shore line. In places a headland projects its rocky height to low tide or beyond and a costly rock cut will have to be made, but these cuts will scarcely exceed one or two to the mile and will usually be short (Seward Gateway 1906b).

Route clearing and removal of vegetation and trees, followed by grading and some improvements like culverts and wooden pile work and bridges continued along Turnagain Arm. Wood was cut locally and steam sawmills were brought in by railroad contractors to make timbers for pilings, bridge lumber, railroad ties and buildings. The

end of track was located at Mile 54 in a short time (Figure 3). Horse drawn sleds were used to freight supplies to the construction camps along the route (Figure 4).

Goodwin made his inspection trip by dog sled through the pass in 1908 for the ARC which had begun making improvements to the trails and facilities en route to Nome from Seward (Goodwin 1908). Goodwin went through Crow Pass but dismissed this route due to the steep slope (Figure 5) and distance across a treeless, exposed area, though he noted the Crow Creek Road as maintained to the mine (Goodwin 1908). Summer passage by Crow Creek Pass was also dangerous though a different experience (Figure 6).

Colonel Mears of the AEC testified before Congress in 1919 that:

The Alaska Northern Railway Co. had started along Turnagain Arm and had built contractors' camps at various points from which to attack the line. At certain of these points that had done some grading, noticeably at Rainbow Creek, Mile 94, where something less than a mile of grade had been practically completed. They had also cleared the right of way over a considerable portion of the Turnagain Arm work on their adopted route, and while we did not in all cases follow the definite location which they had intended to follow in the construction of their line, still the experience gained by their efforts was valuable to the commission in the final determinal of the route over this section (Mears 1919).

Use of the trail was popular and increased as Knik and Susitna Station became important but seasonally accessible towns. Alaska Central paymaster Frank Youngs traveled over the line from Seward to Girdwood (Glacier Creek) in six days, leaving February 17 (Seward Gateway 1906d). Mail carrier Fred Haefs likewise left the 17th and returned the 24th (ibid.). The paper then reported:

Men going to the interior may now travel the Sunrise trail from Johnson creek and cross the Inlet to the north side of the Arm at Glacier creek, taking the railroad trail from the latter point. The distance is about the same and both trails are good. The rough work begins at Glacier Creek (Seward Gateway 1906d).

The Indian Pass route was known and identified as better than Crow Creek Pass, but use would be dependent upon the railroad building a grade to Indian. The article was based on conversations with railroad staff and promoted the notion that the railroad, once past Campbell Point, would be preferred for horse and dog sled travel due to lighter grades and despite being a greater distance from Fairbanks than the competing Richardson route from Valdez (Seward Daily Gateway 1906g). The article outlines this as follows:

A fair trail can be obtained from Indian creek, at mile 88, whenever the railroad reaches that point. A trail already runs up Indian creek, over the divide and down Eagle river (sic, Ship Creek) until it merges in the beach

trail on Knik Arm. This is at least ten miles shorter than the beach trail but involves a hard climb, though not as steep as that over Crow Creek pass, the present route to Knik. It can be traveled now by horses but teams have to be doubled on heavy loads. It cannot be reached by horse-sled until the railroad grade cuts a route through the rocky cliffs on the north side of Turnagain Arm as far as Indian creek (Seward Daily Gateway 1906g).

The lure of this route was diverting the flow of goods traffic from Valdez, port for the Richardson Trail, to the port and railhead at Seward. The article goes on:

When the railroad reaches Indian creek the enormous traffic which now goes over the Valdez trail to the Tanana will be diverted to Seward because the Seward trail will be so much easier to travel. This trade, including the purchases made in Valdez, is now worth several hundred thousand dollars a year and is steadily increasing (Seward Daily Gateway 1906g).

A brief piece describes the journey taken by two miners from the Yentna River mining district to Seward who recounted the obstacles encountered on the way (Seward Daily Gateway 1906h):

Sam Cramer and D.H. Conklin came to Seward from Lake Creek, starting the first of the month. They came down the Yentna in pack ice, reaching Susitna station November 3, but the river froze solid next day. Everything was frozen on the trail from the station to Knik. From Knik they followed the railroad survey along Knik and Turnagain arms. Most of the way they traveled on the beach but in places where headlands project beyond low tide they had to climb over, and some of these rocky hights (sic) are fierce. They found no snow except on the high hills until they reached Placer valley, and there was not much there (Seward Daily Gateway 1906h).

The following year a party from Girdwood (Glacier Creek) reportedly took two days, stopping at MP 28 (Seward Gateway 1907c). One person had a longer voyage:

J.L. Smith is in town from Valdez Creek by the way of Knik. He was with the eight men who came in the first of this month but he had to (go) back because his baggage failed to get on the boat which brought the party from Knik to Turnagain arm. He mushed over the trail by the Crow creek pass route and reports all the streams solid and several inches of snow all along the route. About eight inches covered the summit of Crow creek pass. He was at Girdwood December 10, stayed several days at 49 and reached Seward a day or two ago (Seward Gateway 1906c).

Dog mushing was the main means of overland transportation, knowledge of routes was spread through newspapers and word of mouth, and infrastructure to support travelers grew to meet demand.

Alaska Road Commission (ARC)

Anton Eide of the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) was tasked with building trail from Girdwood to Indian Creek, reported finished in 1908 (Seward Gateway 1908a, 1908b). A subsequent article outlined the route as follows:

The trail by way of the Alaska Central railroad to the end of the track at mile 52, thence by the roadbed to mile 75 at Girdwood, has practically a level grade, and is so easy that it has been covered repeatedly in a single day. From Girdwood to Indian Creek, 12 miles, is the waterlevel trail along the north shore of Turnagain Arm which the government has just completed. It follows the Alaska Central survey. Up Indian Creek over a divide of only 700 or 800 feet altitude, with an ascent of about 3 percent on the Indian creek side and a descent of less than 1 percent on the Eagle River side, the route is so favorable that all who have traveled it say that one horse can haul two tons on a sled the entire distance. The 50 miles from Indian Creek to Knik can be made in a day, as it has been many times by Alfred Lowell (Seward Gateway 1908b).

The Seward Gateway (1908c) editorialized that the railroad, trail and ice-free port of their community made it the ideal port for access to the new gold rush towns on the Kuskokwim River. The editorial read in part:

The location of this new strike can be reached from Seward by passing over the government trail route marked out last winter by George Pulham and W.L. Goodwin. It will be remembered that they started in at Seward and went out the line of the Alaska Central to Girdwood, and then over Crow Creek summit. The new trail that has been built this summer from Girdwood to Indian Creek will make the route much easier and safer. The route then leads on to Knik and Susitna Station, thence across the country to the Kuskokwim. It will be seen, therefore, that those from the outside wishing to reach the Tulisak (sic, Tuluksak) river, or any part of the territory that lies in that region, can do so most readily by taking the route from Seward (Seward Gateway 1908c).

Goodwin's 1908 report begins from the end of track at Mile 54 and continues down the Glacier River to the untracked roadbed of the railroad, then on to Girdwood and over Crow Creek Pass (Goodwin 1908). Goodwin described the final crossing of Crow Creek Pass as 45 degrees up for 1,500 feet, then the same steep angle down to Raven Creek (Goodwin 1908). Goodwin suggested continuing along the right of way of the railroad to Indian Creek, then crossing over that pass, was a better route.

Alaska Northern Railway

The Alaska Central went bankrupt and re-emerged as the Alaska Northern in 1909. Construction continued to Kern Creek on Turnagain Arm (Iditarod Pioneer 1910). Along the route wagon roads were constructed to support construction of the grades, and as

the railroad often did not operate in the winter this became a dog sled trail with roadhouses and trail connections to Kenai, Sunrise, Hope, Girdwood, Indian, Knik and beyond.

Dr. D.H. Sleem accompanied Anton Eide of the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) to the Iditarod area and described the route from Takotna City back to Seward via the Alaska Northern Railway. An adjacent article stated that “Flat Creek will prove to be Alaska’s richest stream,” and businesses in Seward and along the rail line and trail seized the opportunity to capture traffic (Iditarod Pioneer 1910). By 1910 D.H. Sleem of Seward had for sale maps designed for gold prospectors to traverse the country (Figure 2). This map shows the lower Indian Pass trail and the proposed route of the railroad, but not the Crow Pass route improved by the ARC. An example of what the trail along the shore may have looked like is presented as Figure 7. Sleem’s map of Central Alaska (1910) does not show the Crow Creek Pass version of the trail at all (Figure 2) but showed the incomplete railroad route around Campbell Point.

The Kern Creek-Knik Trail, ARC Route 19, was included in the Alaska Road Commission annual reports beginning in 1910 when \$2,300 dollars for improvement and maintenance was funded by road taxes. In 1910 substantial efforts were made to improve the Iditarod Trail from Seward to Nome, spending \$40,000 and anticipating another \$10,000 to continue work in the winter. The 1911 report is the first mention of the Seward-Iditarod trail segment, and read as follows:

This route will carry, in addition to the through travel between Iditarod and the coast, all winter travel to Knik, Susitna, Beluga, Toyonak, and the Susitna Valley. The amount of this travel can not be accurately estimated in advance. Construction work commenced at Old Knik on June 11 and continues to date, the trail being complete to Crow Creek Pass. A total of 44.8 miles have been constructed.

36.3 miles cleared, average width 8 feet-\$3,424.00

8.5 miles graded, average width 5 feet-\$3,143.77.

Total-6,567.77.

An alternate account of the work came from the Iditarod *Pioneer* for February 25, 1911, which gave the account of Bob Griffis (sic Griffiths), who had a contract to deliver gold dust from the M&M bank of Iditarod to Seward. Griffis took 41 days to travel by snowshoe from Seward to the Innoko with a dog team and a party from the Kuskokwim Commercial Company (Iditarod Pioneer 1911a).

According to Mr. Griffis, it is almost idle to talk about a mail service between Seward and Iditarod until the extension of the Alaska Northern is built to Knik, cutting out the almost impossible going between that point and the present terminus of the railroad. This part of the trail lays over mountains and gorges, and is practically impassable for laden dogteams. From Kern creek, the present end of the track, they follow the railroad,

dragging through the tunnels on dry ground. These are glaciated at the entrances so that it is necessary to cut one's way in (Iditarod Pioneer 1911a).

Griffiths also reported that he had met Ross Kinney on the Rohn River who reported the Goodwin party surveying the Iditarod trail route was running out of food. In a second article he reported:

It is Mr. Griffis' opinion that the party continued on toward Seward, but he is emphatic in the opinion that they gave up all thought of trail clearing, and were compelled to get over the ground as fast as they were able to reach supplies before facing actual starvation. Griffis does not apprehend danger of loss of life on the expedition, but he is quite convinced that they must have experienced suffering before reaching their destination (Iditarod Pioneer 1911b).

Griffiths noted that there were few places where mushers could take shelter or get food for themselves and dogs that year. Traffic was increasing rapidly as the Iditarod district rush boomed and people sought to get to remote Iditarod from Seward.

By 1912 there were 72 roadhouses between Kern Creek and Iditarod (Valdez Daily Prospector 1912). Over 200 parties came over the trail from Kern Creek to Iditarod and the Valdez paper published a list of roadhouses with their mile posts from Seward and Iditarod (ibid.). Of note were roadhouses at Kern Creek, Glacier Creek (Girdwood), Crow Creek Mining Company, Summit of Crow Creek Pass (not a roadhouse but an emergency shelter tent), Raven Creek, Eagle River, Old Knik and New Knik (ibid.).

In 1912 the ARC annual report indicated that the trail between Kern Creek and Crow Pass was completed.

During September and October, 1911, the trail was completed from Crow Creek Pass to Kern Creek. The construction was more elaborate than the average for trail construction. Unit costs were:

Grading, side hill, about 6 feet wide, per mile_____	\$778.68
Clearing, about 10 feet wide, per mile_____	80.00
Pack Bridge, stringer type, 124 feet long, per linear foot_____	1.93
Total _____	860.61

The average cost of the section from Crow Creek to Kern Creek was \$220 per mile. The average cost of the entire route (including the work of the period of the last annual report) was \$168.69 per mile.

Belmore Browne's 1912 third attempt to climb McKinley (Browne 1913) used a winter approach by dog sled starting in Seward and followed the railroad and sled trails over Crow Pass. He described the trail as:

This three-foot strip of foot-hardened snow is the only link now joining the village that will some day be a city with the wilderness that in days to come will be an inland empire. The road is not operated in the winter time but the grade is too valuable to stand idle, and after the ties and tracks are covered with snow the scream and rumble of the locomotive gives way to the jingle of dog bells.

The group went from roadhouse to roadhouse, by dog sled and briefly by rail car pulled by dogs, until reaching the end of track at Mile 71. They tried to take a boat to Knik but failed after three days and nights drifting amongst icebergs in the open boat. Browne ascended Crow Creek Pass and the expedition artist and photographer Parker documented the steep grade (Figure 3).

Seton Hall Young, the Mushing Parson, traveled from Iditarod to Seward along the Crow Pass trail (Figures 6 and 7) in March of 1912 (Young 1919, 1927). Companion Edward Scull described a hunting trip to the arctic with Young around this time that used the railroad from Seward to access the Kenai Peninsula for hunting (Scull 1914). Young provided an account of his mush from Iditarod to Seward in *The Continent*, a Presbyterian Church publication, with this section of the trail described as follows:

A Five-Mile Advance in Six Hours

Now hard climbing up a steep road to the base of the pass at Raven Creek roadhouse. A storm is blowing. The snow banners on the mountains that overlook the pass and the fast falling snow make it impossible for us to go on, so we spend a day at this fine roadhouse, kept by three men who are hunters, prospectors and hotel keepers as occasion requires. The second morning they hitch up four big dogs as large as Shetland ponies to supplement our five smaller ones, and a sturdy mountaineer with “creepers” on his feet comes to plot us over the summit. From daylight until noon we struggle before reaching the summit, making only five miles in six hours. The descent from the summit is almost sheer for 2,000 feet.

I have vivid recollections of the trip down that steep place. We turned the dogs loose to follow after the sled. Then tied ropes to the back of the sled, and with their creepers hung on behind to let the sled down. They started it gingerly over the edge of the summit, and I, looking on from above, saw a confused jumble of men, dogs, and sled rolling and tumbling down that path, the snow gathering around and on top of them until when they reached a more level spot they were out of sight in the body of the avalanche, not so deep but that the men emerged laughing and waving their hands.

For myself, it took me an hour to get down to them. I would take my snowshoe, strike the end into the snow ahead of me, and slide down against it, a foot at a time, repeating the operation again and again. Sometimes coming to too steep a place, I would have to edge along some

distance with great care for fear of stumbling over the precipice and wrenching my poor back. But when at last I got to the sled, it was righted and we went gaily on our journey. Not long before we passed this summit two men had lost their lives there, taking chances on a stormy day. One avalanche that would have buried us under fifty feet of snow had it got us thundered into our trail an eighth of a mile behind us.

Down to the town of Glacier (Girdwood) on Turnagain Arm we come at nightfall. Here we bargain with a boatman to set us across the next morning to the old town of Sunrise City, twelve miles away, on Kenai Peninsula. Another hard day's work brings us to a roadhouse up this river, and then, a cold night hardening the crust of the snow, we swing gayly over another high summit, that of the Kenai range, and down to the Seward railroad and along it to a roadhouse twelve miles from Seward. I had telephoned from Glacier to Rev. Mr. Pederson, the Methodist pastor at Seward. At 9 O'clock in the morning of the 28th Brother Pederson, just starting out to meet us, greeted us with a shout as we swung up in front of his house (Young 1913b).

This description of the process of crossing the pass illustrates the risk and costs of the route over Crow Creek Pass. Risks included avalanches, loss of footing and control, storms, cold injuries, and injuries related to moving heavy loads in treacherous conditions. Costs included extra dogs, staying in roadhouses waiting for weather, and the use of extra dogs and men equipped with ice creepers to lift loads to the pass then lower the sleds down to more level ground with ropes.

In 1914 Joe Richards and Julian Schalk had the mail contract between Kern Creek, the end of steel on the Alaska Northern, and Old Knik on the Iditarod mail route. They proposed to build a roadhouse at Indian Creek for the traveling public (Seward Gateway 1914). By this time the construction of a government railroad that included the Alaska Northern was anticipated by local residents as mail traffic to remote interior locations continued. Broad Pass, Chisana and other regions drew some attention in the press and small boom towns continued to grow in remote locations.

In 1915 the rush was on to Anchorage for construction of the government railroad. This was a significant change in that the new terminus became Ship Creek; Knik diminished in significance once the railroad began construction. Concerns about the trail continued as more people followed the trail to Anchorage. Several accounts from mushers and miners were critical of the pass from Indian Creek to Eagle River as particularly difficult.

The worst place on the trail according to J.E. Riley is that from Indian Creek Divide to Eagle River, a stretch of about twenty miles. On that part of the trail there are dead falls for every twenty feet which make travelling exceedingly difficult but which could be removed with a very small expense. In many places it is necessary to unhitch the dogs from the sled. In some places the willows even have not been cut. "An Indian going out to

shoot moose would make a better trail than that” said Mr. Riley. All the travelers agree that Seward ought to have something done at once (Seward Gateway 1915).

The ability to select between the lower Indian Pass to Ship Creek route and the Crow Pass to Eagle River route with its steep section over the pass depended upon the destination (Anchorage or Knik); condition of the trails; and the ability to traverse the section between Girdwood and Indian. The report of the ARC for 1915 stated that:

The work on this route during the year included the removal of windfalls and small earth slides in side-hill cuts. Forty miles of the route were covered by this work at an average cost of \$24.24 per mile. The establishment of a winter mail service from Seward to Iditarod via this route, together with the activities of the Alaska engineering commission at Ship Creek, have added to the importance of the trail, and considerable improvements will be necessary during the coming year (ARC 1915).

From this entry it appears the ARC had selected the route the commission was prepared to maintain, Crow Creek Pass.

Alaska Engineering Commission (AEC)

Beginning in 1913 the federal government began a process of examining the transportation systems of Alaska with a notion to pursue a railroad connection from an ice-free port on the Pacific Ocean to the Yukon River drainage (Hegener 2017). To that end the route surveyed by the Alaska Central and successor Alaska Northern (AN) railways were resurveyed, as were other routes, to determine the most effective path to constructing a rail link to the Interior. In 1914 Congress passed an act to direct the president to construct such a railroad in Alaska on the existing and proposed route of the AN. In April of 1915 construction and reconstruction work began from multiple starting points (Hegener 2017).

Initial Construction

The Alaska Northern’s assets were purchased by the federal government and crews set to work to bring the existing infrastructure up to the proposed standards of the Alaska Engineering Commission (AEC), the agency charged with managing construction. Construction camps were quickly established or refurbished including at Ship Creek. Contracting teams were hired to continue work constructing the railroad line around the shores of Turnagain Arm (Figures 8 and 9), camps established or re-established at creeks between the rocky headlands at Indian, Potter, Rainbow, Sheep, Bird and McHugh creeks. Contractor teams bid on jobs including clearing vegetation; building up the roadway and grade; cutting timber for ties, poles, pilings and boards; laying track; constructing the telegraph system; surveying new and better track alignments; blasting rock; and preparing and placing fill (Bernhardt 1922; Hegener 2017).

The ARC continued to construct and maintain trails in coordination with railroad construction. Conditions on the trails would soon change as construction of the railroad ramped up and changes would accrue to how mail and freight were carried and delivered in Alaska. In 1916 the ARC reported:

Route 19-Kern Creek-Knik Trail (86 miles). --About 13 miles of this trail, following the steep slopes of the mountains along Turnagain Arm, through heavy vegetation, was seriously damaged during the summer of 1915 by forest fires, which destroyed the greater part of the retaining walls and bridges. The work of repair was carried on during September and October, 1915, at an average cost of \$178.26 per mile for the 13 miles covered.

Travel over this route during the past winter was unusually heavy, owing to increases in the mail service and in the activities of the Alaskan Engineering Commission, making some additional work necessary to improve the trail, and keep it free from snowslides and dangerous ice formations. This work covered 34 miles and cost \$30.41 per mile.

The November 21, 1916, edition of the Alaska Railroad Record reported that it was then possible to ride a horse between Indian and Rainbow creeks. By November 28, the trail was completed from Anchorage to the Seward trail at Indian Creek.

The trail from Kern Creek to Knik was a temporary one. The 1917 ARC report states:

During the summer of 1916, forest fires and landslides caused by excessive rains destroyed a large part of this trail along Turnagain Arm. The work of repairing this damage covered about 20 miles, and included removing slides, replacing and repairing bridges and culverts, clearing windfalls and rebuilding cribbing. During the winter two men were employed on the Turnagain Arm section of the trail, repairing it, and keeping it clear of slides and dangerous accumulations of ice.

Upon completion of the new Government Railroad from Seward to Matanuska the larger part of this route can be abandoned, but until the gap between Kern Creek and Anchorage is closed winter traffic over it will be very heavy.

The Alaska Railroad Record of January 2, 1917, reported that the trail from Indian Creek to Bird Creek was completed and the trail construction crew was moving to a point between Bird Creek and Bird Point after the holidays. By February 20, 35 percent of the right of way between Indian Creek and a point a mile north of Girdwood (then Glacier) was complete, as was the right of way save for 1,000 feet between Anchorage and Indian Creek. Contracts were completed on clearing this stretch by April 17, 1917. The trail and bridges between the boat landing at Mile 82 and Mile 79 1/2 and the trail bridge across Bird Creek were completed by October 23, 1917. Twice-weekly mail service during the winter was announced November 13, 1917, using a combination of rail to the ends of

steel, horse drawn sleds where trails were sufficient, and dog sleds where horses could not pass (Alaska Railroad Record 1917).

Railroad Construction Progress

Once the work was underway from the camps at each stream mouth, construction could proceed east and west. The camps were connected by wagon roads and railheads were established at Potter connecting the new port city of Anchorage by rail. Horse-drawn sleds, horse-drawn wagons and dog sleds were used between the camps and to fill in the gaps in usable tracks. This connection coupled with the use of the launch *Alaska* and a barge completed the line between Kern Creek and Bird Point. Rail cars were constructed to transport draft animals working on the project:

Construction of another standard stock car has been authorized by the Commission. The car will be built at the Anchorage shops and will be used to care for Turnagain traffic. Two stock cars are in operation at present on the main line north. The large number of dog teams traveling between Anchorage and Seward necessitate the construction of another car (Alaska Railroad Record 1917).

A significant innovation in 1916 was the initiation of mail service by airplane, including two trips a week from Seward to Iditarod (Cordova Daily Times 1916). This was seen as a way to improve service and reduce the damage to mail and packages from the long travel time by dog sled at a similar cost (ibid.; Schneider 2012). But air mail would not be a consistent and reliable freight transportation means for some time (David 1934).

Among the first tasks for this section was opening trails for the mail and wagon roads connecting the construction camps to the ends of track at Kern Creek and Potter. Some of this work was coordinated between the ARC and the AEC (Bernhardt 1922). In the fall of 1916, a newspaper interview with Anton Edes reported:

The camp at Potter Creek is quite extensive and will be headquarters for some 500 or 600 men who will be at work at the northern end. Steel has been laid eight miles out from Anchorage and will be continued to Potter Creek so that the necessary supplies can be sent out during the winter. Over 100 men are at work on the sled trail along the Arm by which the interior mail will be carried from railhead at Kern creek and supplies distributed to the various station gangs. This trail is nearly complete. Good work by the Alaska Road Commission crew under Martin Lanning is being done between Indian creek and Bird Point, according to the railroad officials (Anchorage Daily Times 1916).

Construction of the railroad and support infrastructure on Turnagain Arm continued to depend on transportation of people, goods and supplies by dog sled, wagon and boat.

Despite improvements to the trail system and the increase in places of potential shelter, trail travelers were still experiencing dangers on the trail.

Fourteen Hours to Travel Five Miles

Jack Sutherland, the Seward-Anchorage expressman, arrived last night and reports fair trails, but bad in places. On their way from Indian Creek Pass to Bird creek, Jack Sutherland and Jack Corwin overtook Mr. and Mrs. Stahl and child who were bound for Glacier Creek. A storm and blizzard were raging at the time and the Stahls were advised not to leave Indian creek, but after starting it was a case of go as the blizzard blew with all its force from their backs. As Mrs. Stahl and child were improperly dressed the men shed part of their clothing to keep them warm and as a result Mr. Stahl had the tips of his fingers frozen and Mr. Sutherland had his cheeks badly frost bitten. It took the party fourteen hours to make five miles on this stretch of the road (Seward Gateway 1916).

Even with a network of roadhouses and trail improvements travel over this section of trail continued to be fraught with hazards and took a long time to cross. This became the subject of barely concealed fiction from Helen Van Campen, who had spent time at Latouche Island in Prince William Sound and Anchorage. Published in the July 22, 1916, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* was a story that included a dog mushing trip along the Sunrise trail to get the female protagonist's father to a doctor in Seward (Van Campen 1916). This publication no doubt elevated the romantic aspects of Alaska life along the trail for a national audience. Van Campen was a noted figure in letters and literature and is represented in the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame with a biographical entry (Hawley 2014).

Despite completion of the district in the fall of 1918 snowslides continued to bury the rails. The Alaska Railroad Record of December 17, 1918, states that trains could run from Anchorage to Kern and from Seward to Mile 49, leaving a 22-mile gap that could not be traversed by rail and two trains stalled in deep snow. Harry Revelle was contracted to take his 33 dogs to Kern to move passengers and freight over the gap.

1919-1923

The railroad was completed between Anchorage and Seward in late 1918 such that trains could go straight through. Construction of snowsheds and other improvements continued and repairs to track and trestles were significant tasks that continued in the Turnagain Arm district.

As of January 1919, the winter gaps in service between Seward and Anchorage were bridged by horse and dog teams in the following sections:

From Seward to Mile 47, the railroad track is clear. From Mile 47 to Mile 58 it is closed, there being from Mile 47 to Mile 57 an almost continuous snow blockade and for 600 feet North of Mile 57 a depth of one foot and a half of water. This water-covered track between Mile 57 and Mile 58 is low and flat, and the water is deep enough to put out the fire in a locomotive engine. To transport passengers and mail between Mile 47 and Mile 58,

the Alaskan Engineering Commission uses two horse teams and three dog teams, each dog team averaging 15 dogs. From Mile 58 to Mile 71, Kern Creek, the line is clear. From Mile 71 to Mile 72, the line is closed as a result of two large snowslides. From Mile 72 to Anchorage, the only trouble reported lately was the snowslide Monday morning at Mile 76 1/2.

The advantages of the completed railroad were notable for price and convenience and despite the winter stoppages. A pamphlet issued by the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce and cited in the Alaska Railroad Record in 1919 states the following:

Has the present constructed portion of the Railroad been of any benefit to miners, prospectors and other residents in Alaska? It has. As an example: it formerly cost more than 25 cents per pound to move freight from tidewater at Anchorage to Chickaloon by pack train. Now it costs less than one-half cent per pound by railroad. It formerly cost at least six cents per pound to move freight from tidewater at Anchorage to Wasilla by dog-sled. Today it costs one third of one cent per pound by railroad (Alaska Railroad Record 1919).

This lowered cost for freight, mail, and packages made dog sledding and draft horses cost ineffective along the route of the railroad. Freight could be transferred from ships at Seward and Anchorage to railroad cars in large quantities and shipped along the line.

By February 28, 1920, a speed record was made for the trip from Seward to Anchorage by the regular passenger train which departed Seward at 8:15 a.m. and arrived in Anchorage at 3:30 p.m. the same day (Alaska Railroad Record 1920).

The 1921 ARC report for Route 19 was succinct:

Route 19. Last expenditure in fiscal year 1917. All but 10 miles from Girdwood to Crow Creek has been abandoned since the construction of the Government railroad. Rehabilitation of this 10 miles begun.

Route 19A. Expenditure included in Route 19. Entire mileage abandoned since the construction of the Government Railroad.

Route 19B. Same remark applies as in Route 19A.

Route 19C. Same remark applies as in Route 19A.

Route 19D. Same remark applies as in Route 19A. Mileage not reported.

In subsequent reports Route 19 became just the Girdwood-Crow Creek Road, listed as ten miles in length and no longer crossing the pass or descending Eagle River. No further moneys were spent on maintaining the trails from Knik and Anchorage to Indian and Girdwood. The road was realigned in 1921 and repaired, and grading was performed in 1922 (ARC 1921, 1922).

Alaska Railroad

Completion of the railroad between Kern Creek and Potter revolutionized travel between the port at Seward and the new headquarters at Anchorage. An article in *Sunset Magazine* from May 1923, discusses the first Pullman sleeping car train in the far north. The article explains the contrast drawn as follows:

A curious blending of the old and new Alaska is this train de lux of the United States Government railroad, although its only physical difference from a thousand others on the North American continent is that the state-room section of the regulation observation car, attached to the rear end, has been converted into a buffet diner. Over this presides J. Casey McDannel, who has packed his blankets from the Rio Grande to the Yukon. Casey blends with the general harmonics of the Sourdough Limited, for it takes a diplomat and one understanding the psychology of man to conduct that diner.

It takes a diplomatic knight of the whisk-broom, too, to deal with the "sourdoughs" essaying their first journey on a Pullman. Some of these men may have not seen such an institution for twenty years, have never ridden on one and find it hard to master the formalities of Pullman travel.

For instance, some grizzled "Musher" steps aboard at a way station with his Dutch socks and boots soaking wet. It has been his custom at roadhouses to hang his socks on the big stove overnight. Unless they are dry there is likely to be a "hiyu" time in the morning, so the porter has a wire over the heater in the day coach where he dries out the pedal adornments of his passengers. When it comes to handling a pair of half rubber and half leather shoe packs, Sambo scratches his head and seeks Casey McDannel's advice (Lincke 1923).

The piece goes on to narrate the former trail beside the railroad from the voice of a grizzled trail musher.

"See that little line running along through the bush?" asks the old-timer. "Well, it was-let me see-back in eighty-something that I dragged my sled behind me over that trail. It was twenty below and the nearest roadhouse was twenty miles up the line. I'll show you where we 'siwashed' for the night when the blizzard came." Following the line he has pointed out, now growing indistinct, the railroad emerges at Spencer Glacier, the divide between the head of Turnagain Arm and the Seward division of the line. Deep chasms cleaver the landscape; a little suspension bridge, swung on poles, hangs like a swallow's nest to the side of the beetling cliff and another swings across the yawning chasms. These served the traveler but six years ago, and the first man hacked his way along the cliffs, portaged his pack and sled over the divide, camped in the snow and threaded his way over the treacherous crevasses of Spencer Glacier (Lincke 1923).

Traveling on the train the narrative moves on to the breakfast menu and compares the options in 1917 as to 1923:

Cantaloupe, 50 cents; watermelon, 50 cents; casaba melon, 50 cents; apple sauce, 25 cents; stewed prunes, 25 cents; grapefruit, 35 cents; bananas, 25 cents; individual jelly preserves, 35 cents.

Eggs in all styles, 75 cents. Bacon or ham and eggs, \$1. All other breakfast dishes \$1.

Bread and butter, 15 cents; rolls and butter, 15 cents; cake, 20 cents; doughnuts, 20 cents; coffee, cocoa or tea, 15 cents.

Fish and other things alternate on this menu.

At first glance the newcomer revises his appetite and his vision of a big meal vanishes. However, when he reaches his first stop and finds the prices only twenty five percent higher than in the average first-class Alaska café, he realizes that they are reasonable. When he ruminates upon the days prior to the coming of the train, conjures that with that thin thread hanging to the cliffs, and, if in winter, that crushed mass of hummocky ice along Turnagain Arm over which only the simplest viands could be taken, where bacon and beans took the place of fried chicken, shirred eggs, casaba melon and cantaloupe, he begins to understand the change (Lincke 1923).

The account continues to the change of trains at Nenana before the bridge over the Tanana River had been completed. Conclusory paragraphs outlined the changes under way following the railroad's completion:

While everything is truly up-to-the minute aboard the "Sourdough Limited," a trip beyond the narrow fringe of brush and hills bordering the railroad plunges one into the primitive wilderness. At some stations along the route the old time twenty-dog teams stand waiting for the mail, but at one point a hydroplane (float plane) is whirring, ready to be off with the mail, while on the road not far from the rails a monster army-type caterpillar tractor is winding like a snake along the snow-crest, literally smashing its way through the great drifts and drawing twenty-five tons of supplies to some out-of-the-way mining camp. Horses follow close behind the tractor. Behind them may come a dog team, and after that a seasoned prospector with a hand sled on which is piled his food supply. ...

The old timer over by the window is gazing steadily at the landscape and dreaming. What dreams! A Pullman train usuring his trail of a thousand tragedies. Surely the old Alaska is vanishing (Lincke 1923).

The Lincke article, published in a lifestyle magazine that originated as a publication by the Southern Pacific Railroad (aka the Sunset Route) for settlers along the line outlines

the goal of railroad construction in Alaska and brings home the dramatic change in the national perception of Alaska once the railroad was completed (Starr 1998).

Efforts in construction of the railroad shifted to the remaining large bridges at Riley Creek and at Nenana which were completed by 1923. Complementary road construction shifted with completion of the railroad. The 1923 Annual Report of the Alaska Road Commission reported that the Southwestern District had 48 sub-projects total in the district, with 11 abandoned and 34 of the remaining 37 roads or trails leading to the railroad. This included Route 19, Kern Creek to Knik, 86 miles and Route 19D, Kern Creek to Indian Creek, 22 miles. The ARC turned over 7 sub-projects to the Department of Agriculture, including Route 19E, Girdwood to Crow Creek, 10 miles. These trails received no further upkeep from the ARC and the Girdwood to Crow Creek section was transferred to the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), then part of the Forest Service (FS).

The Alaska Railroad under government ownership was intended to replicate the suite of tourist and settler amenities that the Southern Pacific, like the Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and other transcontinental railroads had in the latter half of the 19th century across the continental US. Like those railroads, the Alaska Railroad had a national park, hotels, programs for agricultural settlement, and inducements for extractive industry and manufacturing funded directly by Congressional appropriations rather than land grants (Dudgeon 1962). What had been dangerous wilderness where travelers risked injury or death, with the most dangerous sections being the Turnagain Arm cliffs, was tamed by government intervention which provided safe travel by Pullman sleeper on the railroad. The Pullman car was seen as civilizing to passengers who merely entered the rail car.

Travel that had been a risky prospect by dog sled became a route for tourism and business travel. A booklet for the Pacific Steamship Company offered a side tour for passengers landed at Seward to take the train to Anchorage for \$6.85 (\$122.79 in 2024 dollars) as a day trip, not a life-or-death multi-day struggle against nature and the elements (McMicken 1925; Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis 2024). The last frontier had been tamed and commodified.

Once the railroad was completed through Turnagain Arm the trail used by dog mushers was incorporated into the railroad corridor. The ARC ceased trail and road maintenance on routes paralleling the railroad (ARC 1923). Formerly important routes were transferred to other entities (*ibid.*). No newspaper articles regarding travel by dog sled, horse drawn double ender, wagon or sledge were found for the section between Girdwood and Indian Creek or Route 19 in general. Mentions are limited to activities of gold miners in those locations that had been key in travel between Seward and Knik before completion of the railroad. Mail and freight went plane to remote gold mining camps, or from the nearest railway station overland. The trails from Indian and Girdwood over the mountains are depicted in 1951 maps from air photos taken prior to construction of the Seward Highway, meandering along Turnagain Arm between Bird and Indian, and along the creeks from Indian, Bird, and Girdwood (Figure 11).

Colonel H.E. Revelle held the contract for delivering mail between Iditarod and Seward; a four-year contract bid awarded in 1914 at \$100,000 (Valdez Daily Prospector 1914). Complaints were loud with the small volume of mail carried on contract when tons of second-class mail, including outdated newspapers, magazines, and catalogs, arrived at the Iditarod post office (e.g. Iditarod Pioneer 1917).

A 1923 contract solicitation for emergency winter mail service included the following routes, of which one would become the preferred mail route:

- A) From Nancy, by Susitna, McGrath, Toktna (sic), Ophir and Iditarod to Flat, Alaska and Back...
- B) From Kobi, by McGrath, Tokotna (sic), Ophir and Iditarod, to Flat Alaska...
- C) From Nenana, by McGrath, Tokotna (sic), Ophir and Iditarod to Flat, Alaska...

Nancy (Mile 191) and Kobi (Mile 367) are points not postoffices (sic) on the Government Railroad and the contractor on this Flat route will be required to arrange for the deliver(y) and receipt of mails to and from trains (Nenana News 1923).

Once the railroad was completed between Seward and Anchorage in 1918 the train tracks were closed to dog mushing to prevent accidents (Figure 10) with such traffic redirected to the parallel trails and roads. The government, unlike the private company, kept the trains running all winter and cleared avalanches and snow from the tracks, leaving a canyon-like path around the shores of Turnagain Arm with few opportunities for dog or horse powered sleds to leave the path of the trains (Figure 11). Safety was improved as the track was routed to avoid avalanche chutes as much as possible; where trains were blocked, they could return to section camps like Rainbow, Indian and Girdwood until the tracks were cleared. Horse and dog powered sleds were risky with some sections of the trails hazardous despite efforts by the ARC and other agencies to improve them. Train ticket prices were low enough that most travelers preferred to ride the train. Figure 12 shows the project area before the next major change to the landscape: the construction of an all-weather year-round highway.

Seward Highway

Once the Alaska Railroad had been completed the costs of transportation along the line decreased, but not to a level that local farmers and merchants thought was affordable. Advances in motor vehicle production and technology made them increasingly affordable and convenient. Roads suited to use of trucks and cars were constructed and former trails, wagon and sled roads were improved in areas adjacent to the Turnagain Arm section of the Alaska Railroad (Figure 13). Roads were constructed to connect Seward, Cooper Landing and Hope through Moose Pass (Figure 14).

High costs of construction between Anchorage and Canyon Creek were considered to require a large expenditure due to the need for rockwork along the cliffs between Girdwood and Potter, bridges in numerous locations, and fills across tide flats and flood plains. World War II saw vast expenditures on defense infrastructure in Alaska, including the ARR which was taken over by the Army's 714th Railroad Operating Battalion (e.g. Freshour 2010) which worked on construction of the port and tunnel to Passage Canal. Once the Army completed the Whittier Tunnel and port, the possibility of abandoning the expensive crossing of the Kenai Mountains from Seward to Portage became attractive to shippers, the ARR and the Army. This was objectionable to Seward which relied on the port for its financial sustenance.

Another project of interest was crossing Turnagain Arm on a fill causeway from Bird Point to Sunrise (Anchorage Daily Times 1945). Improvements to communications were needed between Portage and Anchorage as snow slides wiped out the telegraph and telephone poles along the railroad several times each winter.

The possibility of constructing a public road for rubber-tired vehicles between Anchorage and Whittier for public and military use became realistic following the end of World War II and the advent of the Cold War (e.g. Noyes 1949). Many speculated again, and the intent was expressed, for the AEC to abandon the Alaska Railroad between Seward and the Whittier interchange as too costly to maintain (Seward Seaport Record 1949a). Quoting a draft letter from the Alaska Development Board intended for signature by the mayor of Seward, it stated:

During the war, an alternative terminus was constructed at Whittier on Prince William Sound. The people of Seward have been given to understand that rail traffic is to be routed via Whittier and the Seward portion of the railroad abandoned as soon as a road connection, now under construction between the Kenai Peninsula road system and Anchorage, is completed. This work is being done under a special congressional appropriation. Some of the road will be within the Chugach National Forest, but the largest portion of it is outside. We understand the work will be completed in 1950.

While the context of the letter was to defend the role of Seward and a desire to lobby the Secretary of Agriculture for more road building funds, the threat of railroad abandonment was of deep concern for the people of Seward who were dependent on the marine-rail freight interchange.

Construction methods, scopes and scales had changed dramatically since the construction of the Turnagain Arm section of the Alaska Railroad. Steam shovels with large crews used in the 'teens were replaced by many smaller crews with tracked bulldozers, powered by diesel engines driving hydraulic pumps for locomotion and rams to power blades and accessories (Ammon 2016). Techniques had been honed by military construction projects across all theatres of war and surplus equipment was cheaply and

widely available with which to substantially change landscapes at large scales more quickly than had been done with hand labor, steam engines and hydraulic sluicing.

Between Indian and Girdwood, the highway took over the railroad track bed and expanded, while the railroad was reconstructed further out from the base of the Chugach slopes to have fewer and larger curves (Figures 14 and 15). This change increased the maximum speed of the railroad line to 45 mph from 25 mph and enabled a two-lane highway to connect Anchorage, Seward, Kenai and Homer, a vast expansion of road served land (Valley Frontiersman 1950). The project was bid by Morrison Knudsen, Peter Kiewit Sons, and S. Birch Sons with a bid of \$5,436,036.62 for the 12.3 miles between Indian and Potter (Daily Alaska Empire 1949).

The project was described in a 1949 article in the Seward Seaport Record (1949b) as follows:

An engineering project of the first magnitude, the job includes excavating 1,791,035 cubic yards of rock that lines the Turnagain Arm shore. The joint railroad-highway bench will extend from near Indian (Mile 88.3) to Potter (Mile 100.6).

This stretch of the highway will run across the present railroad roadbed. The new ARR right-of-way will be closer to the water. A tricky part of the work is managing to run trains while dynamiting and excavation work goes on.

First step is the putting up of a work camp for 300 to 500 men on the heights above Rainbow. About 25 carpenters and workmen are now laboring there under veteran M-K project engineer Gus Rathert. Construction of access roads, grading and leveling work will accompany the building of the camp.

Much like the railroad construction project of 1915-1918, the highway construction with rail line relocation required infrastructure buildouts to support workers and construction activities such as staging, equipment repair and storage, and materials handling. The network of former foot trails that had been expanded first into sled and wagon roads were modernized into paved public highways. The Sterling Highway was dedicated September 6, 1950 by Governor Ernest Gruening (Nome Nugget 1950). The Seward Highway was officially opened October 19, 1951 (Valley Frontiersman 1951). Figure 16 is a 1961 color photograph of the section between Bird Point and Girdwood, when the highway was routed on the slopes above the narrow railroad line at the base of the steep mountains.

The 1964 earthquake resulted in damage to the highway and rail line, but effects were mainly to bridges in the stretch between Girdwood and Indian (Kachadoorian 1968). Indian, Bird, Glacier and Virgin creek bridges and three others were destroyed (ibid., Figure 3). Other earthquakes and regular snow avalanches and rock fall have been consistent impacts on the road and railroad.

The segment of the Seward Highway between Indian and Girdwood since 1951 has been an important part of the highway system with numerous residential, commercial, and recreational users. The number of users increased with the populations of urban Anchorage and suburban and rural areas of the Kenai Peninsula and the Matanuska Susitna boroughs. Realignments and improvements have been made since completion including major projects between Bird Flats and MP 111 completed in October 1983 and between Bird Point and Girdwood completed in June 1996. A set of articles in the Anchorage Daily News in 2009 discussed the number of fatal vehicle accidents in this section (Halpin 2009; O'Malley 2009). Where the old highway alignment was abandoned, it became part of a separated multiuse pathway (Porco 2003). Because of this ongoing construction, the 1964 earthquake and a long pattern of avalanches there are unlikely to be any remnants of improved trails constructed from 1908 to 1917 between Girdwood and Indian.

Character Defining Features

Character defining features for the trail from Kern Creek to Knik would include connection of existing settlements; defined by cleared vegetation from a narrow path up to ten feet wide or greater for wagon roads; grading of the trail where needed; cribbing to stabilize soils on side hills and slopes; culverts to cross small streams, divert water from the trail and prevent glaciating in winter; and construction of bridges over larger waterways. The improvements would primarily be earthworks, with wood superstructures, retaining walls, bridges, and culverts. These were brushed and cleared of deadfall during their period of use.

The trail from Girdwood to Indian would have been cleared up to ten feet wide of vegetation, cut into the slopes to maintain a steady grade or cross the tide flats near the base of the slopes and have improvements to include cribbed retaining walls, bridges, and culverts.

Roadhouses were constructed at intervals and executed in log or canvas. These were constructed by commercial parties in Girdwood and Indian to provide shelter from weather, food for passengers, drivers and dogs, and sometimes community centers. Others were built in or near the passes partly to support commercial enterprises.

Period of Significance

The trail (divided into several segments) between Kern Creek and Knik via Crow Pass was significant from the 1896 Hope gold rush until completion of the Alaska Railroad through Turnagain Arm in 1918. The alternate segment between Girdwood and Anchorage via Indian Creek was significant during government railroad construction from 1915 to 1918 and infrequently used after this period. The other trail segments contributing to the larger Route 19 trail to Knik were not maintained after 1917 and abandoned by 1923 in favor of the railroad and routes were changed to begin at railroad stops.

Discussion

Prehistoric to historic use of the area between Girdwood and Indian likely included two cultural groups, Dené and Suq, who used the area for its marine and terrestrial plant and animal resources (Kari and Fall 2003). The trail connecting Girdwood (MP 74.5), Bird Point (MP 81.0), Indian (MP 88.7), Rainbow (MP 93) and Potter (MP 100.6) were completed in stages before railroad track was laid across this section of Turnagain Arm. The railroad track reached Kern Creek (MP 72) in 1909, with some grade construction, trestles, bridges and rock cuts completed at that time. The railroad roadbed was the trail for postal workers, prospectors and other travelers at the time of the 1909 Iditarod gold rush for the area between Girdwood and Campbell Point (Seward Gateway 1908a, 1908b). Two routes bypassed the most imposing rock cliffs on Turnagain Arm between Campbell Point and Rainbow: Crow Creek Pass to Eagle River, and Indian Pass to Ship Creek (Figure 12). Once at the mouths of the streams they followed the beach to Knik.

From 1896 to 1915, the overland routes were intended to connect gold mining districts to seaports where supplies could be landed, stored and trans-shipped. Movement of freight, passengers, and the mail were the financial drivers of the overland teamster trade by horse, dog and foot. Sometimes teamsters were contracted to move gold from interior camps to banks (Seward Gateway 1915b). Costs were high and speeds were low; sometimes the mushers were unreliable or susceptible to hazards on the trails. These factors led to the commercial effort to construct a railroad to the Yukon River from an ice-free port at Seward, which failed twice due to lack of capital.

By 1915 the federal government committed to purchasing the failed commercial railroad and completing the rail link to the Yukon River. During railroad construction the federal agencies managing the railroad (AEC), and surface routes (ARC) maintained roads and trails connecting the construction camps along the route. Anchorage became the destination and port for freight shipment from the north and Seward continued to be the supply port from the south; Knik became a ghost town. Traffic was high along the route and beyond as mail, freight and passengers traveled along the railroad construction path. Once the railroad was completed from Seward to Anchorage there was no reason to continue travel by dog, horse or human power. Seasonal connections for mail and passengers left from railroad stops to cut short the time on the trail. The former trails were no longer maintained for mail and freight traffic and were last depicted on maps in the 1956 update to the 1951 1:250,000 map (Figure 12). The Indian Creek trail between Girdwood and Indian was no longer depicted; a fragment of trail described as “old mail trail extends from benchmark BM29” and the former Route 19 as “Eagle River Trail” are visible. This is congruent with other routes along the railroad.

Construction of the Seward Highway in 1949-1950 likely obliterated any remaining improvements made to the trail system by the ARC between Girdwood and Indian. The original Seward Highway right of way remains in use as a multiuser trail clinging to the slope face between Girdwood and Bird Point where the highway was built out away from the base of the slope on a rock armored causeway. From Bird Point nearly to Bird the

highway and railroad continue on fill built out from the base of the slide-prone slopes across the tidal flats. From just before Bird to Indian the highway continues across the alluvial fan of Bird Creek to cuts through a ridge at the trail access, a material quarry, then continues across the alluvial fan for Indian Creek while the railroad continues to follow the shoreline.

Reviews of survey notes, master title plats, GLO homestead records and newspaper records show no record of use of a sled trail between Indian and Girdwood after completion of the railroad, and none following construction of the highway. No funding was spent after 1917 on trail maintenance, and numerous segments were abandoned explicitly in favor of using the railroad, which became the “spine” of the updated network of trails. Multiple archaeological surveys have been conducted noting the trail in reference to the AHRS files but no elements of the trail including character defining features were identified (e.g., CRC 2009).

With no physical representation on the landscape and no boundaries, the trail can't be a historic property. In consideration of the fact that it is part of the inventory of historic trails associated with the Iditarod under the National Trails Act, the concept of the trail has representation in federal law.

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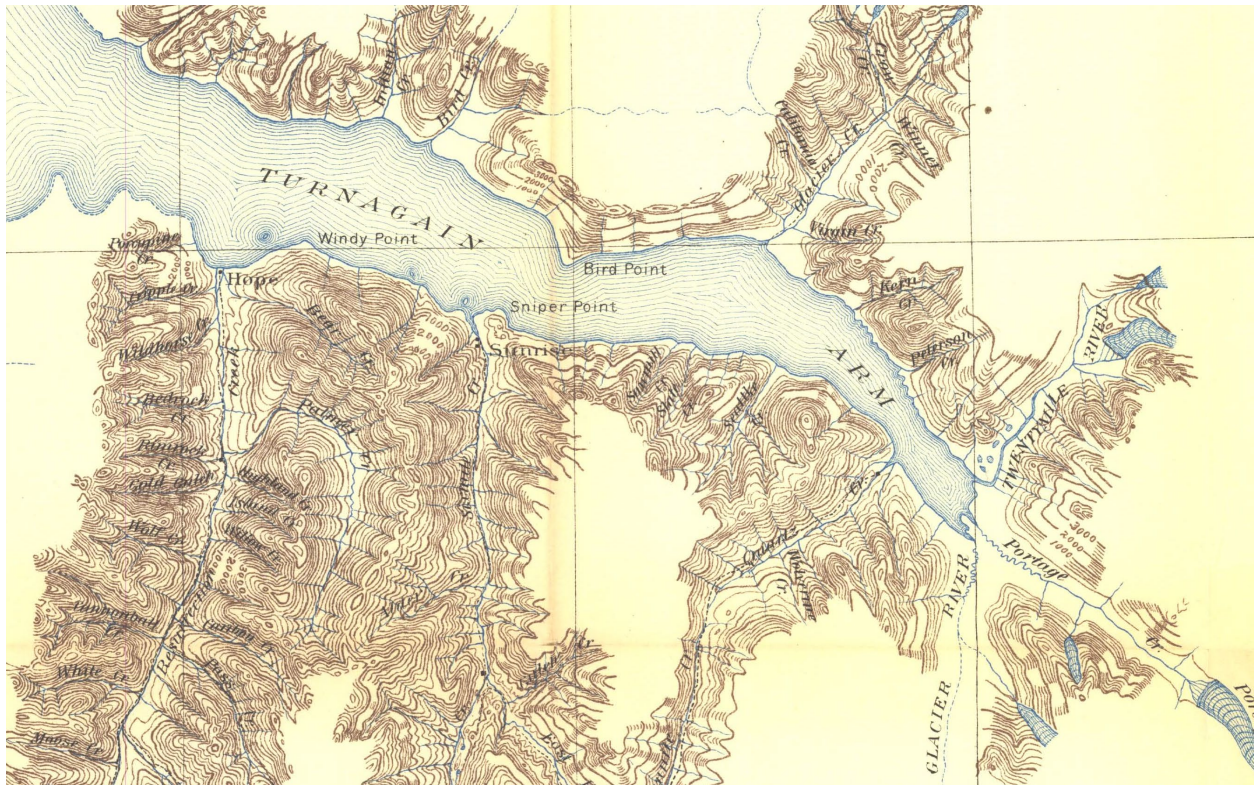


FIGURE 1: 1905 MAP EXTRACT SHOWING TRAILS UP STREAMS ON GLACIER, RESURRECTION AND SIXMILE CREEKS.



FIGURE 2: SLEEM 1910 MAP OF CENTRAL ALASKA EXTRACT SHOWING TRAILS AND RR ROUTE.



FIGURE 3: CAMP AT MILE 54. ALASKARAILS.ORG/HISTORICAL/CONSTRUCTION/ACRY/ACRY-CAMP-54.JPB



FIGURE 4: HORSE DRAWN SLEIGHTS TRANSPORTING SUPPLIES TO CONSTRUCTION CAMPS. ALASKA STATE LIBRARY P226-504, WILLIAM R. NORTON PHOTOGRAPHS, 1890-1920, BY CASE AND DRAPER



"BOB" GRIFFITHS' DOGS PULLING OUR FREIGHT OVER CROW CREEK PASS.

Photo by H. C. Parker.

FIGURE 5: BROWNE'S 1912 WINTER EFFORT TO CLIMB MCKINLEY USED DOG TEAMS FROM SEWARD.



FIRE WEED IN BLOOM, CROW CREEK TRAIL, ALASKA. A.M.P.

Archives. University of Alaska. Fairbanks

FIGURE 6: A FALL VIEW OF THE CROW CREEK TRAIL. S. HALL YOUNG ALBUM, UAF-2001-38-75



AN 20

New grade along Turnagain Arm, sta. 995 to 1020

FIGURE 7: GRADE ALONG TURNAGAIN ARM AVAILABLE TO MUSHERS.



FIGURE 8: 1917 PHOTOGRAPH OF TRAILS, RAILROAD GRADE AND SHORELINE OF ROCKY PROMONTORY.



FIGURE 9: WIDENING THE CUTS MADE FOR THE RAILWAYS. UAF-2013-159-45

OFFICIAL CIRCULARS.

Anchorage Division.

TEAMS MUST NOT USE RIGHT-OF-WAY.

Department of the Interior
 Alaskan Engineering Commission.
 Anchorage, Alaska, October 26, 1917.

Circular No. 265:

TO ALL CONCERNED:

All unauthorized persons are prohibited from using the railroad track, completed grade or right-of-way of the Alaska Railroad which has been recently constructed by the Alaskan Engineering Commission in this Division, as a highway for teams or dog sleds.

The public can readily find suitable means of transportation over the roads and trails which follow closely along the general route of the railroad.

All district engineers, superintendents, and those in authority over the work of the Alaskan Engineering Commission are hereby directed to route all of their business, such as freight teams, mail teams, dog teams, etc., over the wagon roads referred to, and they are directed not to use the track or grade with any sort of a conveyance, nor to permit others to do so.

F. MEARS, Commissioner.

FIGURE 10: CIRCULAR ORDERING DOG TEAMS OFF OF RAILROAD TRACKS.



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

FIGURE 11: RAILROAD CUT THROUGH SNOWSLIDES. AMRC-AEC-G1528



FIGURE 12: SEWARD AND ANCHORAGE 1:250,000 MAPS SHOWING TRAILS OVER INDIAN AND CROW PASSES.

Like a Boulevard



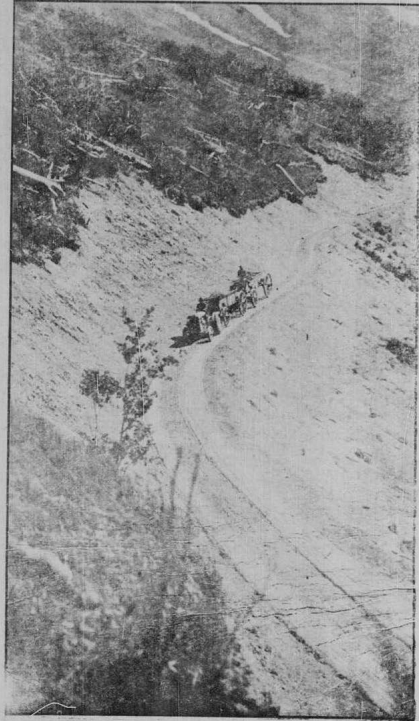
A portion of the splendid highway from Seward to Lake Kenai, Mile 18, traversing a magnificent scenic section its entire length.



In the Wilderness



The Best in the North



A glimpse of the Moose Pass highway during its construction by the Bureau of Public Roads, approximately 50 miles in length. Hundreds from Seward ship their cars during the summer months over the Alaska Railroad to Moose Pass station, 29 miles from Seward, to enjoy this splendid road.



Out after big game

FIGURE 13: HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION IN 1929.



FIGURE 14: BELUGA POINT OVER RAILROAD TRACKS. AMRC-B1976-82-160, SIDNEY HAMILTON PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, ANCHORAGE MUSEUM, GIFT OF EMILY TURNER.



FIGURE 15 ALASKA RAILROAD AND SEWARD HIGHWAY 1957. UAA-HMC-0914-22A. GRACE P. HURST PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM, 1957, UAA CONSORTIUM LIBRARY.



FIGURE 16: MAYNARD C. DAHLSTROM PHOTO TOWARDS GIRDWOOD FROM SEWARD HIGHWAY, 1961. ASL-P414-SS127.



KERN CREEK-KNIK TRAIL, CROW CREEK.

FIGURE 17: 1913 ARC REPORT PLATE 7 SHOWING THE TRAIL THROUGH CROW CREEK.

