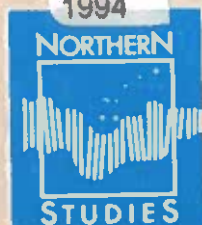


**Historical Information
Regarding the
Overland Trail or the
Yukon Stage Line**

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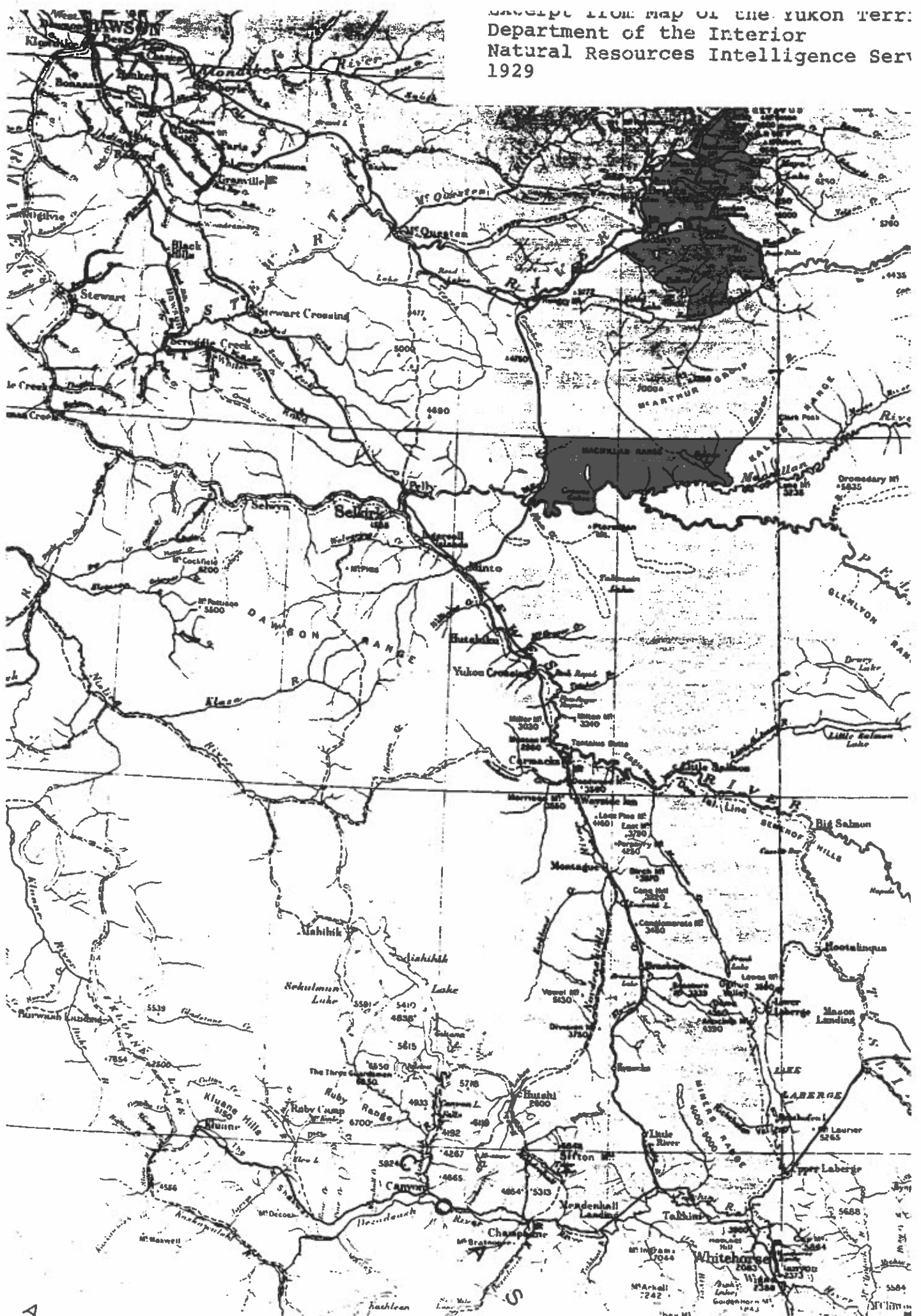
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**HISTORICAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE
OVERLAND TRAIL
OR THE YUKON STAGE LINE**

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**Dawson City Museum and Historical Society
March 1, 1994
Compiled by Greg Skuce**

EXCERPT FROM MAP OF THE YUKON TERRITORY
 Department of the Interior
 Natural Resources Intelligence Service
 1929



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Overland Trail was developed as a dependable winter route for mail, passenger and freight service between the railhead at Whitehorse and Dawson City, the capitol of the Yukon. In the summer the transportation was largely by means of sternwheelers on the Yukon River. Before the Overland Trail was built, travel in the winter was mostly over the ice on the Yukon River, initially by dogteam, and later by teams of horses. This often proved to be difficult because of varying ice conditions and there was always delays during freeze-up in the fall and break-up in the spring when no-one could travel.

In 1902 the Yukon Territorial Government contracted White Pass & Yukon Route to build a trail that was totally over land except for river crossings. The road was built through the summer and fall of that year to a specified 12 foot width with wooden culverts and cribbed embankments. Roadhouses and stables were built every 20-25 miles and stocked with supplies and horsefeed before the end of river navigation. On November 2, 1902 the first stage left Whitehorse bound for Dawson. The finished trail was 330 miles long, 70 miles shorter than the river route and was called the Overland Trail or Yukon Stage Line.

White Pass & Yukon Route obtained the contract for the Royal Mail Service and began operating the Yukon Stage Line with a tri-weekly service increasing to daily trips in the spring and fall when passenger traffic was heavier. An average trip took five days but emergency trips were made in three. The fare was \$125, with roadhouse expenses extra at \$1.50 a meal and rooms at \$1.00. Wheeled stages were used in the spring and fall, and sleighs during the snowy months, pulled by four and six horse teams. The sleighs could carry up to 14 passengers and 1000 pounds of freight. The service was operated in the western American style of trotting the horses between relays, then changing them for rested ones. The company employed a veterinarian and maintained a horse hospital to help care for the 200-275 horses that were used. Harness, sleighs and carriages were manufactured and repaired in Whitehorse after it was discovered that the imported products did not stand up to the colder temperatures and rougher roads. Another northern innovation was the use of a bag-like device placed over the horse's nostrils and breast protectors to help prevent their lungs from freezing in the extreme cold. Passengers were provided with buffalo robes and foot warmers.

The roadhouses were of log construction, well heated, with comfortable beds and good meals were served. The roadhouses were often named for the people that ran them and were reknowned for their hospitality. Farms were started along the trail in order to help supply hay and oats for the horses. Stables were maintained at all the roadhouses as well as on each side of the main river crossings. During the spring and fall, while the ice was unsafe, passengers and freight were paddled across by expert canoeemen, until cable ferries were installed in 1914.

The original route ran west of the Yukon River, from Whitehorse through Carmacks to Yukon Crossing, then east of the river to Dawson. In 1912 the route was changed to accommodate the new placer mining activity on Scroggie Creek and Black Hills Creek. A winter road to Mayo and Keno was added, intersecting the Overland Trail at Minto in 1914. By the late 1920's most

traffic to Dawson followed the Mayo road to Crooked Creek, and then along the south side of the Stewart River to where it crossed at McQuesten, continuing on much the same route as the modern highway from there.

Through the 1920's the mail contracts were obtained by various companies including Coates and Kastner, Greenfield and Pickering, and Klondike Airways. The use of caterpillars and half-track trucks gradually replaced horses as the means of transport. Many of the roadhouses were no longer necessary, and the trip was purportedly much less comfortable for the passengers, who were required to bring their own food.

In 1927 the first mail was flown between Whitehorse, Dawson and Mayo. White Pass & Yukon Route obtained the mail contract again in 1937 and used airplanes to transport passengers and mail. Scheduled road service was abandoned, except for some freighting.

During the second world war there was some discussion of the Alaska-Canada Highway being built along the already established route of the Overland Trail to Dawson and then west to Fairbanks. One of the arguments in this road's favor was that it would provide the war effort easier access to the Yukon's proven mineral producing areas of Dawson and Keno. The more direct route, of course, was chosen in the end.

The modern highway to Mayo was constructed in 1950 and followed only a short section of the earlier route. In 1955 the highway was completed to Dawson, intersecting with the Mayo road much further east than the more direct Overland Trail.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- 1899: First Territorial Government funded road is Ridge Road from Dawson to Gold Run Creek. The route followed the divide between Bonanza Cr. and Hunker Cr. drainages in order to provide access to many of the gold-bearing streams. (p. 235, Webb, Melody. The Last Frontier)
- 1899: Yukon Overland Express and Transportation Co. obtain YTG charter to build and operate road from Bennett to Dawson but construction never started. (p.88, Bennett, Gordon. Yukon Transportation)
- 1899: Canadian Development Company has the Royal Mail Contract and uses dog teams to transport mail between Bennett, which was the railhead, and Dawson, making the trip in 5 days. (Yukon Sun, Feb. 27, 1900)
- 1900-02: Canadian Development Company uses horses and sleighs to haul mail and passengers from new railhead at Whitehorse. The C. D. trail follows the Yukon R. to Lower Laberge, thence the "C. D. cut-off" overland to Chico, Montagu, Carmacks, rejoining the river at Yukon Crossing, then following the river from there to Dawson. They used a system of roadhouses every 20-25 miles and numbered them 1-17. (Pam 1900-47, Y.A.)
- 1901: White Pass purchases all of C.D.C. operations including sternwheelers and stage line in order to obtain the highly profitable mail contract. (p.88, Bennet, Gordon. Yukon Transportation)
- 1902: Yukon Territorial Government allots \$129,000 to White Pass and Yukon Route to construct a winter road from Whitehorse to Dawson and work takes place in the summer. The new road was 330 miles long, 70 miles shorter than the river route. (p.96, Gov't Printing Bureau. Yukon Territory: History and Resources)
- Nov. 2, 1902: The first White Pass stage left Whitehorse with Bill Cameron driver, Herbert Wheeler, superintendent of the mail service who later became president of White Pass, and George A. Jeckell, a school teacher who later became Comptroller of the Yukon Territory. (p.99, Hamilton, W.R. The Yukon Story)
- 1902: White Pass operates Yukon Stage Route using a total of 13 roadhouses. Wheeled stages operated tri-weekly and passenger fares were \$125 (when sleighs were used through the snowy months the fare was \$100) with roadhouse expenses extra at \$1.00 per night and \$1.50 a meal. 200-275 horses were used and there was a company veterinarian and horse hospital in Whitehorse. Drivers were known as "skinners." (MacBride, W.D. The Yukon Stage Line)
- 1904: Winter road constructed from Dawson to Mayo after gold discoveries in the area. (p.184, Mayo Historical Society. Gold and Galena)

1907-1914: Alternate wagon road built from Dawson to Mayo, also Klondike River to Flat Creek road, Jensen Creek to Clear Creek road and the Minto to Galena Creek road linking Mayo directly to Whitehorse. (p.86, Bennett, Gordon)

1912: Extensive route changes made to accommodate placer mining areas being developed on Scroggie Creek and Black Hills Creek (p.194, Yukon Territory: History and Resources)

Dec. 1912: First car driven on Overland Trail by George Potter with Commissioner George Black and C.A. Thomas, resident manager of the Yukon Gold Company - car was a 60 h.p. Locomobile and they made the trip in 35.5 hrs. Joe Boyle and his wife were actually a few days ahead in an overloaded 20 h.p. Flanders auto but were forced to abandon the car near Whitehorse (p.190-192, Green, Lewis. The Gold Hustlers)

1914: Motor vehicles on Overland Trail are now common enough to necessitate road improvements and regulation of vehicle speed. Cable ferries are installed on the Stewart, Pelly and Yukon Rivers. White Pass develops the technique of booming the river above each ferry to jam the ice and lengthen the time the ferries could be used - as soon as the ice was formed above the ferry, the river could be crossed by the sleighs, minimizing the need for canoes. (p.92, Bennett, Gordon.)

1914: A total of 1400 miles of roads have been built in the Territory. (p.235, Webb, Melody)

1916: An overhead cable carrier designed for passenger, freight and mail is erected at Yukon Crossing. (p.103, Bennett, Gordon)

Nov. 17, 1920: D. Coates and Otto Kastner obtain the mail contract and arrange to lease all the White Pass owned roadhouses and stables until the spring of 1922. (W.P. & Y.R. Canadian Gov't Mail Contracts)

1920's: The direct route to Dawson through Scroggie and Black Hills is abandoned and the diminishing traffic to Dawson follows the route from Stewart River to Flat Creek to Klondike River. (p.67, Bostock, H.S. The Arctic Circular)

1923: Emil Forrest and Cam Smith drive the first caterpillar operated supply train to Mayo from Whitehorse. (p.188, Gold and Galena)

1923-24: Trucks replace the wheeled stages used during the spring and fall travel and cats are used in the winter on the section of trail between Whitehorse and Yukon Crossing -horses were still used on the northern sections of trail. (p.103, Bennet, Gordon)

1925-1929: Pickering and Greenfield obtain the mail contract with Greenfield managing the Whitehorse end and Angus McIntyre the Dawson-Mayo end. (p.188, Gold and Galena)

- 1927: First unofficial flight carrying mail from Whitehorse to Dawson and Mayo by Andy Cruikshank. (the mail bag was thrown out of the plane at Dawson by Mrs. Cruikshank) (p.201, Coates and Morrison. Land of the Midnight Sun)
- 1928: Greenfield and Pickering begin to fly mail during freeze-up and break-up. (p. 120, Bennett, Gordon)
- 1929: Klondike Airways (T.C. Richards and W. Phelps) obtain mail contract and use caterpillars and half-track trucks. Cat operators are known as "catskinners." (p. 185, Gold and Galena)
- 1937: W.P. & Y.R. obtain the mail contract again and use airplanes for mail delivery and passenger service. (Macbride, W.D. Yukon Stage Line)
- late 1930's: Scheduled road service is abandoned, however, some freighting is still done, especially to Mayo and Keno. Passenger service on the cat trains was much less comfortable than the horse and sleighs with few roadhouses still in operation. Passengers could fly for \$250.00. (p.3-17, Aho, Dr.)
- 1942: The possibility of using the Overland Trail as part of the Alaska-Canada Highway system is discussed, offering an already established route and access to the mineral producing areas of the Yukon. (p.257, Webb, Melody)
- 1949: All weather road completed between Whitehorse and Carmacks. (p. 189, Gold and Galena)
- 1950: All weather road constructed to Mayo. (p. 241, Webb, Melody)
- 1955: All weather road finished construction from Dawson to Stewart Crossing. (p.241, Webb, Melody)
- Oct. 9, 1960: Bridges officially opened on the Stewart and Pelly Rivers. (p.190, Gold and Galena)

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