

CHISANA RIVER BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE

Name	Author	Year	Reference	Report Name
Chisana River	BLM	October 16, 1975		Navigability Investigation Report on Chisana River. Background, land status, physical data, historical use and current use. Personal statements of boat use of Chisana River.
	BLM	November 7, 1978		Report on Navigability of Nabesna River, Eastern Alaska. Provides information on historic boat use on Chisana River.
	Bleakley, Geoffrey T. U.S. DOI, National Park Service	2005 Revised and Expanded		A History of the Chisana Mining District, Alaska, 1890-1990, pp. 9, 19.
	Capps, Stephen R.	1916		The Chisana-White River District, Alaska, Department of Interior, United States Geological Survey, p. 27.
	Cole, Terrence M.	May, 1979		Historic Use of the Chisana and Nabesna Rivers, Alaska. Alaska Department of Natural Resources.
	Grumman Ecosystems Corporation	April, 1975		Report on Navigability of Streams Tributary to the Tanana River, Alaska. Prepared for US Army Engineer District, Alaska pp. 3-17, Copy No. 6 Vol I pp. 4-489-492, Copy No. 6 Vol III pp. 8-29, Copy No. 6 Vol IV
	Stern, Richard O.	March 2, 1979		Personal Interview of Ted Lowell taken by Richard O. Stern and Terrance Cole of Alaska Department Natural Resources regarding boat use and history on Nabesna/Chisana River.
	US Dept. of Interior, BLM Navigability Bibliography	3-Jul-79	02267	Eakin, H. M. Exploration in the Cosna-Nowitna Region. USGS Bulletin 642-H. Washington: GPO, 1915, pp. 211-222.
	Alaska Department of Fish and Game	9-Feb-05		Waterbody Use and Observations Questionnaire, Interview of Corey Schwanke
	Alaska Department of Fish and Game	March 7, 2005		Waterbody Use and Observations Questionnaire, Interview of Mark Keech

NAVIGABILITY INVESTIGATION REPORT

on CHISANA RIVER

Affecting Northway Natives, Inc. Selection F-14912 A&B

I concur with the findings of this report

Thomas D. Williams 10/16/75

Gerald D. Timmons, Fortymile Area Manager

Richard H. LeDosquet

Richard H. LeDosquet, District Manager

BACKGROUND

The State of Alaska asserts that the Chisana River within the Native selection area is navigable. Northway Natives, Inc also asserts that all of the Chisana River within their selection of lands is navigable. BLM has declared the Chisana navigable as far as the bridge on the Northway road.

LAND STATUS

The Chisana and Nabesna Rivers flow together to form the Tanana River. The Chisana has been declared navigable by BLM from this confluence upstream about four miles to the bridge across the river on Northway road. From its mouth, the Chisana flows for about 20 miles entirely through lands selected by Northway Natives, Inc. About 16 miles from the Northway bridge to the selection boundary are in question as to navigability.

The part of the Chisana in question varies from a 100 to 300 foot width. Depth varies from 5 to 20 feet and the variation throughout the season at a given point is in the neighborhood of five to ten feet, depending on rainfall, runoff, and watertable. The river meanders but has one fairly well defined channel. As in any river of this size, there are changing channels and sandbars exposed at low water. Banks are solid in many areas and gradual and marshy in other areas.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Historical data from various sources indicates that the Chisana has long been used as a travelway for subsistence living and hauling supplies, at least as far as Scotty Creek and Mirror Creek, which are far beyond the Native selection area. Six signed statements by local natives document this use.

Various natives live along the Chisana and they have been supplied by traders and other sources for their living by riverboats, motorboats and other water craft traveling the Chisana. They have used this river as a travelway annually for their subsistence living, trapping muskrats, fishing and hunting. They also trapped and fished on the river itself.

The Alaska Highway was built in 1941 and became an alternate route for travel and obtaining supplies. The river was still used for such, after the highway was built, because the highway does not give direct access for people living along the river or using the river.

CURRENT USE

Current use is the same as historical use, as evidenced by the signed statements. The river is still used as a travelway for people living temporarily or permanently along the river. It is also used for access to other places for trapping, fishing, and hunting, both on a subsistence basis and on a recreational basis; and is used directly for fishing and trapping of muskrats for subsistence and recreation.



Jerry W. McGee, Forestry Tech. 9/9/75 JW

NAVIGABILITY FIELD REPORT

PHYSICAL DATA

1:63,500

Number/Name of Water Body Chisana River Quadrangle Tangcross A-2

Native Selection Impacted Northway Natives F-14912 N. 63509 D-2

Location of Water Body T R S M
T 15 N R 19 E T 14 N R 20 E T 12 N R 20 E
T 14 N R 19 E T 13 N R 20 E CRM

Length 17 Mi. Width 100 - 300 ft. Depth 8-15 ft

Area Unknown

Discharge Unknown

Bank Characteristics river has wide braided channel but banks are well defined & relatively high.

Channel Characteristics meanders moderately, somewhat braided

Obstructions to Navigation snags & low water sandbars, but no permanent or total obstructions

Flood Characteristics floods @ 4-5 ft - over banks occasionally

Length of Useable Season April - freezeup

Type of Watercraft Commonly Used in Area river boats & canoes of all sizes - outboard motors also.

Other Transportation Systems Available Alaska highway

Need of Use of Water Body in Future Continued access to subsistence and recreational resources. Also development of agricultural and/or mineral resources south of Northway should call for work beyond those

Tidal Influence None

Remarks:

Report Prepared by Terry Mc Bee Review TDA

Date _____ Date 10/16/75

NAVIGABILITY FIELD REPORT
HISTORICAL OR PRESENT USE DATA

Number/Name of Water Body Chisana River Quadrangle Tenacoe/Welona

Native Selection Impacted Northway Selection F-14912

Location of Water Body T R S M
T 15N R 19E, T 14N R 20E, T 12N R 20E, T 14N R 19E,
T 13N R 20E C.R.M.

- Type of Use(s) Travelway for subsistence living -
supplies hauled for people living along the river all the way up the
to Scotty Creek
Travel clear to Scotty Creek for hauling supplies, hunting,
access to fish camp.
Roy Sam - travels every year for last 28 yrs, past mouth of Mirror Cr. by motor
Amount of Use as needed
but on a yearly basis

~~the~~ River is still being used for hauling supplies.

Area of Use Clear to Scotty Creek & past
Also up past mouth of Mirror Cr.
Also up to Gardner Creek

Season of Use/Date May - September

Type Watercraft Used riverboats, & canoes

Development Along Water Body
Past Native houses, fish camps,

Present 40 acre Native allotment near 10-mile camp - river is
still used for access to this
various houses & camps

Future
various houses & fish camps will be maintained

Sources of Information Walter Northway (native 98 yrs old) statements
Della Northway, Roy Sam, Stewart Albert, Lilly Northway,
Kenny Albert

Physical Report prepared? Yes No

Report Prepared by Jerry McLee Review TDW
Date _____ Date 10/16/75

= April 16, 1975

To Whom it may concern:

I have traveled down Nabesna River from Northway Village and up the Chisana River to our house at 10¹/₂ Mile, a house at Stuver Creek, to a camp and house at the mouth of Gardner Creek, every year for over 50 years by motor boat.

The only way we could get supplies to our camps was by river boat in the early 1900's.

We hunt moose every year up the Chisana River all the way to Gardner Creek. We still use the Chisana River to transport supplies & food to our various houses & camps.

I am 72 years old. I have traveled the Chisana River with my husband and family.

Lilly Northway

Witnesses:

Rosemary Maher
Jane Liza Jee

RECEIVED
ANCHORAGE AK.
JUN 6 10 01 AM '75
BUREAU OF LAND
MANAGEMENT
MAIL ROOM

April 16, 1975

To Whom it may concern:

I have traveled the Chisana River by motor boat from the Chisana River bridge to Hillside Lake numerous times since I was 3 years old. I am now 26 years old.

My family has a house at 10-Mile which is used at various seasons of the year.

We carried supplies and food by river boat on the Chisana River to the house at 10-Mile ~~many~~ numerous times.

Quana M. Northway
Quana M. Northway

BUCKLAND
Northway, Alaska 99764
May 5, 1975

Dear Sir:

I for myself & other elders that still live here in Northway, have used the Nabesna River for many years. It was our way of getting to & from places: Tetlin, Tanacross & also to Nabesna Village. To get to Tetlin, Tanacross or Delta Area, we have to go down Nabesna River to get to Chisana River.

In 1913 a large steam boat came up Chisana River into Nabesna River hauling freight to gold mine camp in Nabesna. The name of the steam boat was called Tana. This time the boat came up the river, it unloaded passengers at the mouth of the Nabesna River to lighten the boat so it could travel easier on up the river. The passengers (about 100-150) built log boats and poled up the river to the gold mine at Nabesna. There was much activity on this river during this gold rush.

I have traveled up Chisana River by river boat all my life, first with my folks and later by myself and with my family, for hunting, hauling supplies to our camps and our house at 10-Mile. We also go up river to stay at our fish camp. We go up much further than the mouth of Scotty Creek.

Before the Alaska Highway was built, store owner, Herman Kessler, hauled his store ~~xxx~~ supplies to Northway by river boat from Fairbanks. He had his store here from about 1921 until he died in the 1950's. He's buried at Northway cemetery. During the same time, I worked for other store owners here in Northway: John Hidavich & Teddy Lowe. They also hauled their supplies by river boat from Fairbanks to Northway. And I hauled supplies for them by river boat from Northway Village up the Chisana River to people living along the river all the way up to Scotty Creek.

The unnamed lake in Section 23, 24, 25 & 26 of Township 14N., R18E., C.R.M. is not unnamed in our language. We use it by canoe and small boat. There are hardly any lakes around here that the people of Northway have not used.

I am 98 years old.

xxx Walter Northway

Walter Northway

F-14912
Office of Northway

May 5, 1975

To Whom it may Concern:

I was born on the Chisana River near the mouth of Gardner Creek when my family and other people from Northway were hunting. Since then I have traveled the Chisana River many times a year by motor boat, going all the way to the mouth of Scotty Creek.

I have also been, by motor boat, up the Nabesna River for hunting many times.

I can remember, before the Alaska Highway was built, a store owner at Northway, Herman Kessler, hauled his supplies from Fairbanks to Northway by inboard motor boat.

Kenneth P. Albert
Kenneth P. Albert

RECEIVED
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MAIL ROOM
JUN 12 9 45 AM '75
REGIONAL OFFICE
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

RECEIVED
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
DISTRICT OFFICE
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA
JUL 10 AM 10:00

DEPT OF LAND
MANAGEMENT
MAIL ROOM

JUN 8 10 01 AM '75

RECEIVED
ANCHORAGE AK.

May 6, 1975

Dear Sir:

I have traveled up the Chisana River by motor boat many times a year, all my life. With my folks when I was small. For fishing and hunting. I have been up further than the mouth of Scotty Creek.

I have helped other people haul supplies up to camps and cabins along the river.



Stewart Albert

May 6, 1975

Dear Sir:

Every year I have traveled up the Chisana River, all my life. My family has lived at 10-Mile Camp year around when I was young. The river was the only way to get food and supplies up there.

I still travel the Chisana River. I have a 40 acre Native Allotment near 10-Mile Camp. The river is still the only way we get supplies up there.

I have seen airplanes land on Skate Lake many times. Pilots we don't know, who are traveling through, land on this lake, walk to Airport to buy fuel, have a truck bring them back to their airplane. Lavell Wilson, Tok, Alaska has also landed on Skate Lake.

The unnamed lake in Section 23, 24, 25 & 26 of Township 14N., 18E., C.R.M. we use by canoe and small boat hunting muskrats. This lake is not unnamed in the Athabaskan language.

Della M. Northway

Della May Northway

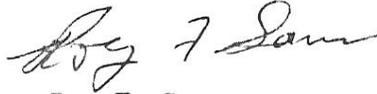
RECEIVED
MAY 6 10 01 AM '75
KNOXVILLE, TN

May 7, 1975

I have been traveling up Nabesna River by motor boat for the last 28 years, about 35 miles (river miles) up.

I have also traveled up the Chisana River, about 90 river miles up, starting at Northway Village. Every year most of my life we go up Chisana River by motor boat, many times past mouth of Mirror Creek.

I have seen many float planes land on Skate Lake. Gas from Airport is driven down to them or the pilots walk to Airport to get gas and then ride back to their plane.



Roy F. Sam
P.O. Box 467
Northway, Alaska 99764

3-1-82 (5)
C. L. L.

Chisana Airport
Glennallen, AK
99588

3-1-82

Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources
Div. of Research and Development
Attn: Historians
Pouch 7-005
Anchorage, AK 99510

Greetings:

Sorry that I have not been able to comply with your request for info regarding the use of the Gakona River. I have been in Fairbanks for medical attention this winter and my mail was not forwarded, hence this late reply.

Our address here is a bit confusing. Our postoffice is Glennallen but Chisana is located over on the east side of the mountains on the Chisana River. We do not have any reason to use the Gakona River.

However, we do use the Chisana River especially during the winter and spring. Historically the Chisana (pronounced Shushanna) River has been very important to the comings and goings of people. Before gold was struck on Bonanza, Eldorado and Gold Run Creeks both the Chisana and Nabesna were used by various individuals in addition to the Indians who resided here at that time. It was not uncommon for someone to walk over from the Chitina, Nazina Country, build a boat (whipsawed lumber) or raft and drift down to Fairbanks. After gold was struck the Chisana was quite an important waterway.

Today we use it as an avenue of access to the Alaska Highway via Scotty Creek by snow machine during freesup and it offers various emergency landing strips for aircraft during the summer. Last spring (before breakup) a Cat Train navigated it and only went through the ice once. Jet propelled boats make it up here when they want and I noticed a couple air boats up at King City during hunting season.

The early maps showed the Tanana River coming all the way up to the glacier but I think it was in about 1902 they learned that the river here had a different name. It used to be that the Tanana River started where Scotty Creek and the Chisana join but it is generally considered now that the Tanana is formed by the joining of the Chisana and the Nabesna.

I think the Chisana - Tanana should be considered navigable from the glacier to St. Michael. In fact the old timers brought many, many sled loads of equipment and supplies over the Chisana Glacier. Even a sawmill and steam engine.

Sincerely,
Ivan Thorall
Ivan Thorall

*Memorandum*DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

IN REPLY REFER TO:

2650 (93)

TO : Chief, Division of Resources (930)
Chief, Branch of Lands & Minerals

FROM : Historian

SUBJECT : Report on Navigability of Nabesna River, Eastern
Alaska

Date:

NOV 7 1978

I. Physical Characteristics - Nabesna River¹

About 86 miles long, the Nabesna River rises at the foot of Nabesna Glacier, and flows in a meandering braided channel for 75 miles to unite with the Chisana River and form the Tanana River. The river traverses a broad alluvial valley. Highly silted, with numerous gravel and sand bars throughout its length, the river is constricted to a single channel in only one reach, near river mile 27.

The river drains an area of 2,185 square miles. The river basin is about 100 miles long and 30 miles across its maximum width. From its headwaters at the foot of the glacier, the river descends from an altitude of 2,980 feet to 1,980 feet at Lick Creek at an average gradient of 23.2 feet per mile. From Lick Creek to the mouth, the river descends 280 feet at an average rate of 6.5 feet per mile.

Landform in the area above Lick Creek is extremely high and rugged. All of the tributary valleys are V-shaped and have steep gradients. The Nabesna River valley is U-shaped with steep walls. Below Lick Creek landform is characterized by both high, hilly terrain, and flat but sloping outwash plain, and featureless muskeg and bog flats. The eastern edge of the Mentasta Mountains runs parallel to the river to mile 25. The Black Hills run through a section of the river between mile 30 and mile 25. North of the Black Hills is an area of black spruce, muskeg, and bog lakes, through which the lower 20 miles of the river flows.

From the headwaters to Lick Creek, the river channel is highly braided. According to representatives of Grumman Ecosystems Corporation who inspected the river in July 1974, the main channel of flow in this reach is extremely difficult to detect. The channels are numerous and narrow; and the flow is extremely swift with standing waves prevalent. In areas of extreme braidedness, the depth appeared to be shallow, often only inches deep. Where channels came together, the depth was probably greater. Channel widths were highly variable. Single channel widths ranged from 20 feet to about 1,000 feet. The representatives did not measure the velocity in this reach, but estimated it to be at least five feet per second. No snags or blockages were observed in the channels.

From Lick Creek to the mouth, the river is characterized by swift, turbulent flows, relatively shallow stream gradient, and an abundance of stream volume. Although the river exhibits a braided character in this reach, the main channel of flow is more recognizable. The river began to exhibit a meandering character in its lower few miles, flowing through muskeg and bog lakes near Northway. According to the Grumman Ecosystems Corporation representatives, the flow appeared to be very swift, even near the mouth, as standing waves were present. In July 1974, the river stage was moderately high. There was some inundation of vegetated area, yet not all gravel bars were covered over. Water depth could not be measured due to the tremendous flow of water upon the weighted depth line. Channel widths ranged from 100 to 1,000 feet in the main channel of flow. Bank-to-bank widths in many cases exceeded one-half mile, and approached one mile. In July 1974, the representatives measured the velocity just below the mouth of Lick Creek at five feet per second in the main channel, and seven to eight feet per second in a side channel. No snags or blockages were observed in this reach, although log piles were seen on gravel bars.

The river is frozen six to seven months of the year. Maximum open water flows occur during July. Annual maximum flows may exceed by four times the annual average, while winter flows may only be 20 percent of the average.

Major tributaries of Nabesna River include: Boud Creek (mile 77), Jacksina Creek (mile 71.7), Jack Creek (mile 68), Platinum Creek (mile 64.8), Cooper Creek (mile 62.1), Stone Creek (mile 59.1), Lick Creek (mile 43), and Cheslina River (mile 25.8).

II. Chisana River - Physical Characteristics ²

Heading in Chisana Glacier, the Chisana River flows about 60 miles in a northeasterly direction and then turns to a northwesterly direction for 55 miles to join the Nabesna River and form Tanana River. In the upper 15 miles the river flows in a braided channel which has cut deep trenches in the glacial debris of the broad valley floor. Below Cross Creek, the river enters a canyon section cut through the Nutzotin Mountains for a distance of 14 miles before emerging onto the broad lake-studded valley floor of the upper Tanana River. Through the canyon section the river is confined to a width of about one-fourth of a mile. Heavily silted, the river is constricted to one channel below Mirror Creek.

About 120.5 miles long, the river drains an area of 3,420 square miles. The river basin is about 90 miles long and 50 miles wide across its maximum east-west extension. From the foot of Chisana Glacier, the river descends 1,625 feet to the mouth of Mirror Creek at an average gradient of 27.4 feet per mile. In the upper 5.5

miles, above Geohenda Creek the river descends 295 feet at a rate of 53.7 feet per mile. From Mirror Creek to the mouth, the river descends 195 feet at an average gradient of 3.2 feet per mile. The river discharges an average flow of 2,430 cubic feet per second.

Landform in the area above Mirror Creek is extremely rugged. Slopes are unvegetated and excessively steep. All of the stream valleys, with the exception of the Chisana, are V-shaped, and downward erosion is excessive. Below mile 85 the river enters the outwash plain, and the relief in the area is less pronounced with only an occasional hill breaking the horizon. The Black Hills cross the river near mile 65. Below Mirror Creek, the landform is characterized primarily by an extensive area of black spruce muskeg and bog lakes.

From the headwaters to Mirror Creek, the river is characterized by a high fall rate, extremely braided stream channel, and a swift current. According to representatives of Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, the channel of main flow is indistinguishable above the mouth of Cross Creek. Numerous glaciers discharge meltwater in this reach. From mile 105 to mile 95, just above Sheep Creek, the river is relatively well-defined, although several channels are present. From the mouth of Sheep Creek to Mirror Creek, the river becomes extremely braided and shallow so that a main channel again becomes indistinguishable. The flow is very swift throughout the entire reach, as standing waves were present in many locations. Unable to make depth measurements, representatives of Grumman Ecosystems Corporation estimated the depth of the river at about mile 102.5 to be about three feet. Shallower depths were observed throughout the upper reach. Main channel widths varied from 100 yards at mile 102.5 to less than 30 feet in areas of extreme channel braidedness. Bank-to-bank widths approached two miles just below Chisana while it narrowed to about one-fourth of a mile below Cross Creek. Bank-to-bank widths north of the mountains often exceeded one mile. In July 1974 river velocity measured at mile 102.5 was eight feet per second. River velocity was observed to be very swift throughout the entire upper reach.

Below Mirror Creek the river is characterized by a well-defined channel of flow. Immediately below the mouth of Mirror Creek, the stream gradient lessens and the braided character disappears. The stream gradient was 27.4 feet per mile above Mirror Creek, but only 3.2 feet per mile below Mirror Creek. Thirteen feet deep at the mouth, the river has a good depth throughout this reach. Channel width ranged from 200 feet near Mirror Creek to 600 feet at the mouth. Velocity measured near mouth of the river in July 1974 was about three feet per second. The river was then in a moderate stage.

The U.S. Geological Survey has maintained a gaging station on the river at Northway Junction since 1949. Maximum stage and discharge:

June 22, 1962, gage height was 11.7 feet and 10,000 cubic feet per second. On July 5, 1959, the gage height was 12.4 feet. Discharge was not recorded on that date.

Like the Nabesna River, the Chisana River is frozen six to seven months of the year.

Major tributaries of the Chisana River included Chathenda Creek (mile 113.4), Cross Creek (mile 105.9), Chavolda Creek (mile 105.5), Sheep Creek (92.2) Mirror Creek (mile 61.2), Scottie Creek (mile 54.2), Gardiner Creek (mile 33.8), and Stuver Creek (mile 23.8).

III. History - Mining

Both the Nabesna and Chisana Rivers have been exploited by white prospectors and miners since the early 1900's. Following the Klondike Gold Rush, Geological Survey and War Department investigations, the discovery of rich copper deposits near Chitina River, and the construction of the Valdez-Fairbanks trail, prospectors entered the upper Tanana River area by land in increasing numbers. In 1905, copper sulphides were discovered on Jacksina Creek, a tributary of Nabesna River. The Royal Development Company subsequently worked the prospect, and erected a 3-stamp mill at the site in 1906. According to a U.S. Geological Survey report, the mine was yielding, in 1908, \$12 a ton. ³

Later, in 1929, a company was organized to mine gold at the present site of Nabesna. The company placed a mill in operation at the site in 1931. Mining continued with some interruption until about 1947, when most of the ore bodies were exhausted. Gold valued at \$1.9 million had been produced at the mine. ⁴

On July 11, 1978, it was announced in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner that the Nabesna mine townsite was for sale. Three miles of tunnels at the mine had yielded 70,000 ounces of gold and a like amount of silver. The mine reportedly closed in 1946. The Minerals Exploration Company purchased the place in 1966, and subsequently desired to sell the mine. ⁵

Mining on Chisana River began in 1913. In that year, several prospectors in Dawson, Canada, reported a rich find in the headwaters of Chisana River, and thereby caused a minor gold rush to the area during the fall and winter of 1913-14. Several thousand men rushed to the country, many of them inexperienced and most without the proper equipment and supplies. The winter proved hard to many of the prospectors, and large numbers subsequently left. A few of the prospectors who had staked the most valuable placer ground remained, and some were still mining the creeks in the late 1930's. In 1940, total production of placer gold from the Chisana district was estimated to be about \$970,000, most of the gold coming from Bonanza and Little Eldorado Creeks and the tributaries of Wilson Creek. ⁶

IV. History--Trading

Indians of the upper Tanana River first came into contact with white trade goods through the Copper River Indians. In the 1900's, however, the white traders penetrated the area via the Tanana River. In 1907 or 1909, a certain Captain Northway established a trading post near the mouth of Nabesna River and possibly on the Tetlin River. In 1913, it was reported that Northway traveled by boat each summer to his trading post near the mouth of the Nabesna River, where he traded with the Indians and worked on his copper properties in the Nabesna River valley.

Trading posts were maintained in the upper Tanana River area during the 1910's and 1920's. A certain W. H. Newton (or Merritt) operated a trading post at the mouth of the Nabesna River, and at Tanacross, while a Herman Kessler maintained a trading post near the mouth of Gardiner Creek, a tributary of Chisana River.

In the 1930's two rival traders, Ted Lowell and Milo (or John) Hadjukovich, operated stores at Tanacross, Tetlin, and at the mouth of Nabesna River. Goods were brought in during the summer in power-driven shallow-draft scows, and distributed to the three posts. In the winter the traders drove dogteams to their various stores where the Indians would meet them, and on occasion they went to the more distant Indian camps. During the spring, they journeyed from camp to camp via boat with outboard motors.

According to R. L. Jennings of the Alaska Native Service in a report prepared in the late 1940's, there were two stores located at Northway: the Northway Native Store and the store operated by Herman Kessler. ¹⁰

V. History - Communities

Since the early 1900's a number of Indian camps were located along the Nabesna River. In February 1908 a U.S. Geological Survey party established a base camp at "Sargent's Cabin" near the mouth of Camp Creek. The party reported the existence of an Indian village at the mouth of Cooper Creek. ¹¹ According to Robert McKennan, who visited the area in 1929, a band of upper Chisana - Nabesna Indians had a winter camp near the mouth of Cooper Creek. An earlier village was located on the Nabesna River two miles upstream, also on the east bank of the river. The original village ¹² was on the west bank of the river, at the mouth of Platinum Creek.

Nabesna, a mining town, is located near Jacksina Creek. The town was probably founded in the late 1920's when mining of lode gold near White Mountain began. The town is presently abandoned. A hunting lodge is near the town. ¹³

Northway, a former Army Air Corps station, was founded in 1942 with the constructin of an aviation field and facilities for 13 officers and 140 enlisted men. ¹⁴

Nabesna Village, located about six miles above the mouth of Nabesna River, on the west bank, is probably one of the oldest Indian villages on the river. The village may have been called "Khiltats" in 1907. ¹⁵ Early trading posts of Northway, Newton, and others may have been located in the village.

Northway Indian Village, located near the Northway station, was probably established in the early 1940's. ¹⁶

Charlieskin Village and Kathakne are located near Fish Lake in the lower reach of the Nabesna River. The U.S. Geological Survey reported the local names in 1954 and 1955, respectively. ¹⁷

Following a survey of Nabesna River by helicopter in July 1974, representatives of Grumman Ecosystems Corporation reported the existence of hunting and mining settlements near the headwaters of the river. Several cabins and lodges were located on the Slana-Nabesna Road along Jack Creek. No cabins or camps were observed on the river below the mouth of Jack Creek. At the head of the river, a copper mining community had begun to develop within the past year. A rich supply of copper ore was discovered in the vicinity of Orange Hill (mile 83). Improvements in the lower reaches of Nabesna River were confined to the last 10 miles of the river, where Northway, Nabesna Village, and Northway Indian Village are located. The eastern boundary of the Tetliq Indian Reservation follows Nabesna River from mile 25 to mile 15. ¹⁸

On Chisana River, settlements have been located on Chathenda Creek, Gardiner Creek, and Cross Creek. Chisana, a mining community, is located in the headwaters of the river, near Chathenda Creek. The town was established about 1913 as a result of placer mining operations in the area. ¹⁹ In the 1910's a trading post was established on Gardiner Creek. Herman Kessler, who operated the post, traded primarily with the Scottie Creek Indians, who were, according to Robert McKenna, totally nomadic, having no permanent villages. This band ranged from Gardiner Creek on Chisana River to Snag River to hunt. ²⁰ In the late 1900's, a U.S. Geological Survey party reported the existence of an Indian community on Cross Creek, opposite the mouth of Notch Creek, where a few families had their winter houses. ²¹

In July 1974, representatives of Grumman Ecosystems Corporation surveyed the entire river by helicopter. With the exception of Chisana and developments along the Alaska Highway, ²² no cabins or campsites were observed on the Chisana River.

VI. History - River Transportation

Regular transportation of the Nabesna River has been limited to the lower reaches. Since the late 1900's traders at Nabesna Village supplied their posts by boat via the Tanana River route. In the early 1940's, with the construction of an aviation field at Northway, small river boats of 45-ton capacity ascended Tanana River from Big Delta to the Nabesna River, and then up²³ the Nabesna River approximately seven miles to the Northway garrison.

There is little evidence of boat travel on the Nabesna River above Northway. In the 1940's, a U.S. Geological Survey party reported that the prospects on Orange Hill were accessible from Nabesna by boat or horse. The party recommended care in selecting the route across the rapidly shifting channels and stated that crossings should be made at low water.²⁴ According to Mr. Lou Jurs, and Dr. Ken Brakken of the Alaska State Office, Bureau of Land Management, hunters frequently use the river between Nabesna and Northway in rubber rafts and boats while on sheep hunting expeditions. During their survey of the Nabesna River in July 1974, representatives of Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, did not observe boats on the river above Northway.²⁵

The Chisana River, on the other hand, has a long history of river boat traffic. A trading post on Gardiner Creek was supplied by boat during the 1910's. During the Chisana Gold Rush of 1913, a large number of people ascended the river as far as Chathenda Creek in poling boats. According to a U.S. Geological Survey report: "On the circulation of the report that rich placer discoveries had been made in the Chisana basin, a considerable number of men made their way up Tanana and Chisana rivers by launches and small boats. Under favorable conditions launches may be taken up these rivers as far as the north front of the Nutzotin Mountains, and boats were lined or poled all the way up to the mouth of Chathenda Creek. The route from Fairbanks, the base of supplies, is, however, long and difficult and, although possible, will never be an economical route for bringing in supplies. In the fall of 1914, many persons availed themselves of this water route, and built boats in which they rowed downstream to Fairbanks."²⁶

On August 23, 1960, an Indian allotment was granted to Walter Northway of Northway. The allotment is located on Chisana River (62°55'18"N, 141°36'32"). A field examination revealed long use of the site. The allotment was accessible only by river boat, light float airplane, and dog sled.²⁷

Surveying the Chisana River in July 1974 by helicopter, representatives of Grumman Ecosystems Corporation did not observe boats on the river.²⁸

VII. History - Land Transportation

The Nabesna River is presently reached by two primary land routes. The Slana-Nabesna Road extends from Slana on the Glenn Highway to the Nabesna Mine near the headwaters of Nabesna River. The Northway Junction-Northway Indian Village Road extends from Northway Junction on the Alaska Highway (Alcan) to Northway Indian Village near the mouth of Nabesna River. ²⁹

The Slana-Nabesna route has long been the primary route to the headwaters of Nabesna River. Originally a pack trail, the route was used on a regular basis by prospectors and miners beginning in the 1900's when lode gold deposits near Jacksina Creek were developed. Visiting the area in 1908, a U.S. Geological Survey party described the route as follows: "Travellers bound for the river usually follow a trail that leaves the Government military trail from Valdez to Eagle near the mouth of Slana River. This trail ascends the Copper River to Batzulnetas, whence it continues southeastward to the heads of Jack and Platinum Creeks, either of which leads directly to Nabesna River, although Platinum Creek offers the better route for summer travel." Supplies were brought from Valdez. "The cost of freight is probably not less than 35¢ per pound under favorable conditions and may be considerable higher. Grass for horses is available in favorable localities in the latter part of May or early in June, ³⁰ and later in the season is abundant on the head of the river."

During the Chisana Gold Rush of 1913, some prospectors followed the Slana-Nabesna route in order to reach the diggings on Chisana River. Upon reaching the Nabesna River, the prospectors crossed the river to Cooper Pass, through which they traveled to arrive at the headwaters of Notch Creek, a tributary of Chisana River. Notch Creek was then followed to Chisana River. Due to its length, the route was not popular during the gold stampede. ³¹ In the late 1920's, the Alaska Road Commission made substantial improvements to the route as the Nabesna Mining Corporation began large-scale mining operations at Nabesna. By the late 1930's or early 1940's the route was passable for trucks.

The Northway Junction-Northway Indian Village Road was constructed during the 1940's as a feeder to the Alaska Highway. The road provided access to the aviation field at Northway.

There are three major trail routes in the Nabesna River valley, all of which appear on modern U.S. Geological Survey maps. One trail, identified as a winter trail on U.S. Geological Survey maps, extends from Nabesna Village to the foot of the Mentasta Mountains; it is located on the west side of Nabesna River. Several cabins are incrementally spaced on the trail. Another trail extends southerly

from Northway to the area of Jatahmund Lake. Finally, a winter trail extends from Nabesna River to Chisana River, following the base of the mountains in the upper reaches of the rivers. ³²

Except in its lower reaches, where the Northway Junction-Nabesna Indian Village Road crosses the river at river mile 4.0, the Chisana River valley is inaccessible by road. There are, however, several trails in its upper reaches. A winter trail extends from Chisana River to the headwaters of Beaver Creek, following the base of the mountains. Another trail extends up the west limit of the river from the northern edge of the mountains; it is a continuation of the winter trail linking the Nabesna River and the Chisana River. Finally, there is the Cooper Pass trail, which was used by some prospectors in the 1910's to reach the placer ground at Chisana. ³³

VIII. History - Air Transportation

Three aviation fields are located in the Chisana River and Nabesna River area. One aviation field is located at Chisana; it was constructed by the Alaska Road Commission in the late 1920's or early 1930's. Another aviation field is located near Orange Hill (in the headwaters of Nabesna River), the site of recent copper-mining operations. The final aviation field, located at Northway was originally 350 x 5,300 feet. Two years later the Civil Aeronautics Administration extended the field to 7,500 feet and paved ³⁴the runway. The field was suitable for freight transport airplanes.

In the early 1940's a natural aviation field near Nabesna mine was used by pioneer aviator Bob Reeve to transport equipment from Nabesna to Northway. The field was located on a river bar. Reeve was contracted by Morrison-Knudsen Company, which had a contract with the Civil Aeronautics Administration to improve the Northway field, to transport equipment by airplane to Northway. The equipment was transported from Valdez to Nabesna, then loaded on wagons and hauled by cat tractors over five miles of muskeg to Reeve's river bar landing field. In a five-month period, Reeve transported ³⁵1,100 tons of equipment by airplane from the river bar to Northway.

Floatplanes have reportedly landed on the Nabesna River near Northway and on the Chisana River near Gardiner Creek. One airplane made a forced landing in Jacksina Canyon in 1933; it was subsequently hauled ³⁶about 20 miles to a point near the Nabesna mine by a four-horse team.

IX. Conclusion

The history of the Nabesna River valley may be distinguished by four phases. In the first phase, a period which may extend from prehistoric times to the 1930's, the Nabesna Indians traveled up the valley each

winter to cabins near the mouths of Platinum, Cross, and Camp Creeks. In the spring the Indians returned to their camps near the mouth of the Nabesna River to hunt, trap, and fish. In the second phase, a period existing from the mid-1900's to modern times, the headwaters of the Nabesna River was the scene of commercial mining activities. The third phase began with the establishment of a trading post near the mouth of Nabesna River in the late 1900's. With the development of permanent trading posts near the mouth of the river, the Nabesna Indians' camps lost their seasonal character, becoming instead permanent villages. The final phase began with the construction of the Alaska Highway and the Northway aviation field in the early 1940's. Additional communities were established near the mouth of the river and linked by modern land and air transportation facilities.

There is little evidence in the historic record that the Nabesna River was used for the purpose of travel, trade, and commerce. Although Indians have long traveled up the river from the Tanana River to cabins on Platinum, Cross, and Camp Creeks, they made such journeys during the winter. Commercial mining operations near Jacksina Creek, in the headwaters of Nabesna River, have long been served by the Slana-Nabesna Road, originally a pack trail. Trading posts and Indian camps near the mouth of Nabesna River were supplied by boat. During the construction of the Northway aviation field, equipment, material, and supplies were taken to the site by airplane and by boat. Evidence of travel on the Nabesna River south of Northway consists only of hunters descending the river in rubber rafts and flat-bottomed boats with jet units.

Given the historical evidence, it is improbable that the Nabesna River from Northway to the foot of Nabesna Glacier is susceptible to navigation. Due to the fact that the Nabesna River was accessible by land, there was little cause to use the river as a transportation route. Mines near Jacksina Creek were reached via the Slana-Nabesna route. A winter trail follows the course of the river from Nabesna Indian village. When the Northway aviation field was improved in the early 1940's, materials were taken to Nabesna by land from Slana, and then shipped by air to the aviation field.

Historical use of the Chisana River as a transportation route supports the view that the Nabesna River is not susceptible to navigation. During the Chisana Gold Rush of 1913, prospectors reached the placer diggings by land and by water. Some followed the Slana-Nabesna route; and some ascended Chisana River as far as Chathenda Creek by poling boat. There is no evidence that the Nabesna River was used as a route to the Chisana placer diggings. Due to the existence of a land route to Nabesna, and the existence of a water route to Chisana, it is clear that there was no cause to use the Nabesna River as a transportation route.

Therefore, it is recommended that the Nabesna River be declared navigable from its mouth to Northway. It is further recommended that the Nabesna River from Northway to the foot of Nabesna Glacier be declared non-navigable.

Charles W. Brown

FOOTNOTES

¹The description of Nabesna River is taken from Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, Report on Navigability of Streams Tributary to the Tanana River, Alaska. Prepared for U.S. Army Engineer District, Alaska, Vol. IV (April 1975), p. 4-469 ff.

²The description of Chisana River is taken from Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, Report on Navigability of Streams Tributary to the Tanana River, Alaska. Prepared for U.S. Army Engineer District Alaska, Vol. IV (April 1975), p. 4-489 ff.

³F. H. Moffit and A. Knoff, Mineral Resources of the Nabesna-White River District. U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 379-D (Washington, 1909, pp. 176-177.

⁴A. E. Nelson, et al., Reconnaissance for Radioactive Deposits in Eastern Alaska, 1952. U.S. Geological Survey Circular 348 (Washington, 1954), p. 4; F. H. Moffit, Mining in the Northern Copper River Region, Alaska. U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 943-B (Washington, 1944), pp. 45-46.

⁵Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, July 11, 1978, p. 6.

⁶F. H. Moffit, Geology of the Eastern Part of the Alaska Range and Adjacent Area. U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 989-D (Washington, 1954), p. 197.

⁷Ramon B. Vitt, "Hunting Practices of the Upper Tanana Athapaskans" (unpublished thesis, 1971), p. 33; Fairbanks Daily Times, July 3, 1913, p. 3.

⁸Ibid., pp. 37, 39; Robert A. McKennan, The Upper Tanana Indians (New Haven, 1959), p. 27.

⁹McKennan, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰Northway, File No. 431, FRC Box No. 1610, RG 75, Records of Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

¹¹F. H. Moffit, et al., Mineral Resources of the Nabesna-White River District, Alaska, with a Section on the Quaternary. U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 417 (Washington, 1910), p. 15.

¹²Vitt, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

- ¹³Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, op. cit., p. 4-473.
- ¹⁴James D. Bush, Jr., "Narrative Report of Alaska Construction, 1941-1944 "(unpublished manuscript, n. d.), pp. 110-111.
- ¹⁵Donald J. Orth, Dictionary of Alaska Place Names. U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 567 (Washington, 1971), p. 668.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 703
- ¹⁷Ibid., pp. 201, 501
- ¹⁸Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, op. cit., pp. 4-473, 4-479, 4-480.
- ¹⁹F. H. Moffit, Geology of the Eastern Part of the Alaska Range and Adjacent Area, p. 197.
- ²⁰Vitt, op. cit., p. 40.
- ²¹F. H. Moffit, et al., Mineral Resources of the Nabesna-White River Area, p. 15; M. F. Guedon, People of Tetlin, Why are You Singing? (National Museums of Canada, 1974), p. 15.
- ²²Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, op. cit., p. 4-489.
- ²³Bush, Jr., op. cit., pp. 110-111.
- ²⁴A. E. Nelson, et al., op. cit., p. 4.
- ²⁵Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, op. cit., p. 4-494.
- ²⁶Stephen R. Capps, The Chisana-White River District, Alaska. U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 630 (Washington, 1916), p. 27.
- ²⁷W. Northway, Indian Allotment, File No. 024788, FRC Box No. 94282, RG 49, Records of the Bureau of Land Management, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.
- ²⁸Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, op. cit., p. 4-489 ff.
- ²⁹See U.S., Geological Survey, Map of Nabesna Quadrangle, 1965. Scale 1: 250,000.
- ³⁰F. H. Moffit, et al., Mineral Resources of the Nabesna-White River Area, pp. 12, 13, 14.
- ³¹Stephen R. Capps, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

³²Grumman Ecosystems Corporation. op. cit., p. 4-480.

³³See U.S., Geological Survey, Map of Nabesna Quadrangle, 1965.

³⁴Ibid.; Bush, Jr., op. cit., p. 111.

³⁵Beth Day, Glacier Pilot; The Story of Bob Reeves and the Flyers Who Pushed Back Alaska's Air Frontiers (N.Y., 1957), p. 210.

³⁶Ibid., p. 93.



A History of the **Chisana Mining District, Alaska** **1890-1990**



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3

**A History of the Chisana Mining District,
Alaska, 1890-1990**

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National Park Service
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**Revised and Expanded
2005**

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PREFACE

Writing the history of a mining district is normally a rather straightforward process. Federal regulations stemming from the Mining Act of 1872 forced miners to document their claims in exhaustive detail. As these records are usually readily accessible, they provide an ideal basis for most studies.

The Chisana district, however, totally lacks such primary documentation. After its recording office closed in 1930, the district's papers were moved across the Wrangell Mountains to the community of Chitina. Due to that town's precipitous decline following the closure of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway in 1938, the records were subsequently transferred to Copper Center, where they were ultimately destroyed in a structural fire in July 1945.

Fortunately, other research options remained available. Both the United States Geological Survey and Alaska's Territorial Department of Mines occasionally visited the area and recorded key facts about ownership and production. The district's mining activity was also thoroughly covered in local newspapers, including the *Dawson Daily News*, *Whitehorse Weekly Star*, *McCarthy Weekly News*, *Chitina Leader*, and *Cordova Daily Alaskan*. Several oral and manuscript accounts were available as well.

This study is derived from those sources.

INTRODUCTION

Gold has always been an elusive mineral. This was especially true in Alaska, where persistent seekers followed its trail for decades. Beginning with a strike in the Silverbow Basin near Juneau in 1880, prospectors soon crossed the Coast Range and explored the upper reaches of the Yukon River. In 1886 they moved down the Yukon to the Fortymile River and, in 1893, on to Birch Creek, near Circle. Three years later, George Washington Carmack filed the first claims on Rabbit Creek, soon renamed Bonanza Creek, initiating the Yukon Territory's famed Klondike rush. Other stampedes followed, including ones to Nome in 1899 and 1900, Fairbanks in 1902 and 1903, and the Iditarod in 1909. In 1913 discoveries along the northern margin of Alaska's Wrangell Mountains provoked the territory's last important rush: to the remote headwaters of the Chisana River.¹

Although a relatively minor producer by world standards, the Chisana district remains interesting for several reasons. It typifies, for example, the development of placer mining in Alaska, advancing through a number of discrete stages and employing a broad range of technology and equipment. It is also unusually well preserved. A scarcity of water and an abundance of steep terrain limited hydraulic mining and prevented dredging. Its remote location helped to reduce pilfering as well. As a result, this district retains extensive evidence of its early use.²

Its rush was also quite distinctive. Unlike the stampede to Livengood, which occurred the following year, this one was widely publicized and contained a clearly international component, including members from throughout the Pacific Northwest. It was also larger. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, which had a correspondent on the scene, estimated that over eight thousand people joined the Chisana rush. Even more conservative government sources guessed that over two thousand prospectors participated. The Livengood stampede, in contrast, only attracted a few hundred individuals.³

Two ingredients contributed to the unique character of the Chisana rush. One was its timing. In 1913 most of the world was still at peace. Had the strike occurred the following year, the First World War would undoubtedly have limited participation.

Transportation played an important part as well. The newly completed Copper River and Northwestern Railway and the vastly improved Valdez Trail greatly simplified the approach to the diggings. Unlike its predecessors, this strike occurred less than one hundred miles from the railhead.

To grasp the true nature of any stampede, however, it is first necessary to understand the needs and goals of the individuals who joined it. Historians, for example, have offered many explanations for the size and duration of the Klondike rush. Most have concentrated on the issues troubling American society during of the 1890s.⁴

The United States changed radically during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Although the nation successfully entered the modern age, it was a costly transition, fostering

7

the misdistribution of wealth, power, and prestige in a country that boasted egalitarian traditions.

The 1890s were a particularly trying time. The panic of 1893, for example, sharply curtailed industrial growth. It also caused thousands of bankruptcies and generated extensive unemployment. Serious differences now separated rural and urban constituencies, capital and labor, large and small manufacturers, and new immigrants from the older population.⁵

Farmers were probably the hardest hit. Once viewed as the standard-bearers of Jeffersonian democracy, they now received pathetic returns for their toil. They also enjoyed little protection from exploitation by the banks and railroads.⁶

Historian John Hicks, writing about the origins of the Populist insurgency of the 1890s, detailed the crux of the problem:

In an earlier age the hard-pressed farmers and laborers might have fled to free farms in the seemingly limitless lands of the West, but now the era of free land had passed. Where, then, might they look for help?⁷

Prevented from achieving prosperity at home, some of these individuals undoubtedly sought out new opportunities in the Klondike.

The Chisana stampede, however, occurred nearly a generation later under vastly different conditions. The interclass conflict which characterized the 1890s had largely dissipated by 1900. Most Americans were far more prosperous, and the agricultural sector had done especially well. Farm prices, for example, increased by nearly 50 percent between 1900 and 1910. Despite the short-lived panic of 1907, industrial workers had also benefited. Unemployment levels had dropped and job opportunities appear to have grown. What then motivated this new generation of stampedeers?⁸

Many participants, both in and out of Alaska, were aging veterans of the Klondike rush. Some, like George C. Hazelet, by then a successful businessman living in Cordova, may have seen this stampede as a last grand adventure.⁹

The majority of stampedeers probably pursued more tangible objectives. Virtually all of the older Alaska-Yukon gold camps were now in decline. Most were also dominated by large industrial concerns, limiting the options available to individual miners. Although Alaska's gold production peaked in 1909, the day of the solitary prospector was ending.¹⁰ In the Klondike it took outside investors more than ten years to capture control of the area.¹¹ The Morgan-Guggenheim Syndicate, however, dominated most of the Iditarod district after only two.¹²

Forced out of established diggings, prospectors sought new openings elsewhere. Some must have seen the Chisana area as their final opportunity to make a stake. That perception may also help explain the length of their stay there. All three discoverers and many early stampedeers spent the remainder of their lives in the district, eking out small but consistent incomes while continuously searching for that one last strike.

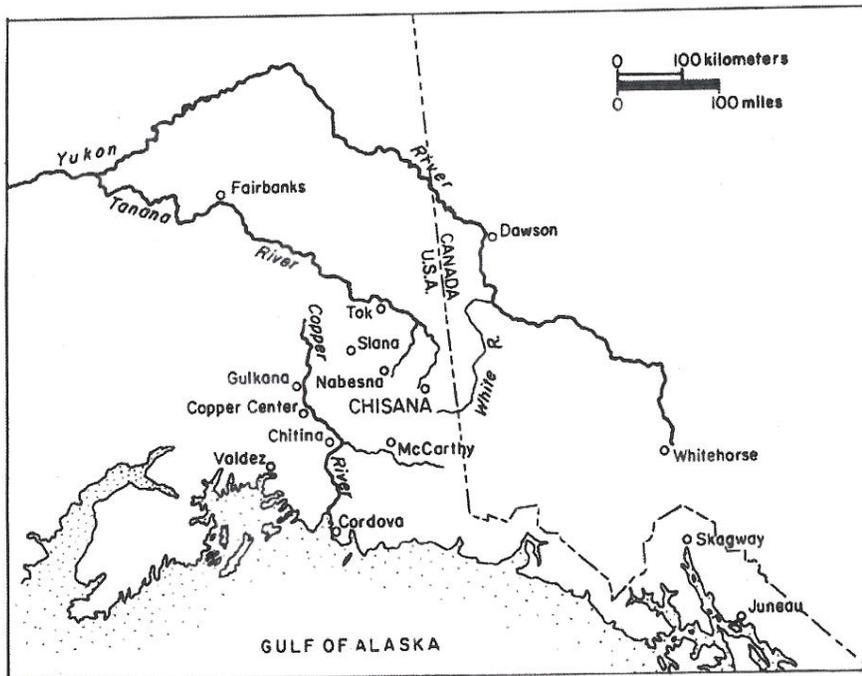


Figure 1: Alaska

CHAPTER ONE

EXPLORATION

Prior to the arrival of white invaders, indigenous peoples held virtually all of Alaska. The greater Chisana region, for example, was shared by three Athabascan groups.¹ The Ahtna ranged east from the community of Batzulnetas, often reaching the Nabesna River; the Southern Tutchone held the lower and middle reaches of the White River, occasionally ascending Beaver Creek; and the Upper Tanana controlled the territory surrounding the Chisana River. The Tanana people also established the first village in the vicinity. Situated on Cross Creek, just opposite the mouth of Notch Creek, it was only about six miles northwest of the future site of Chisana City.²

Americans first penetrated the region in 1891, when a three-man exploring party, consisting of Frederick Schwatka, Charles W. Hayes, and Mark Russell, traversed from the White to the Nizina River through Skolai Pass. While not discovering any gold, Hayes reported finding copper nuggets on Kletsan Creek, located near the head of the White River.³

Seven years passed before prospectors regularly entered the area. Henry Bratnober and Jack Dalton examined the upper White River country in 1898, including Kletson Creek.⁴ Although they, like Hayes, found several small copper deposits, the area's remoteness discouraged any sustained investigation.⁵

United States Geological Survey (USGS) parties also began scrutinizing the area in 1898. William J. Peters and Alfred H. Brooks, for example, inspected Beaver, Snag, and Mirror Creeks, passing about forty miles north of the Chisana district.⁶ The two returned to the region the following year, tracing the northern edge of the Wrangell Mountains between the White and Nabesna Rivers.⁷ Oscar Rohn also visited in 1899, crossing the mountains via the Nizina and Chisana Glaciers.⁸

Two other USGS geologists made a more significant contribution. Frank C. Schrader and David C. Witherspoon purchased several locally obtained copper nuggets from the Upper Tanana residents of Cross Creek Village. Later, they also detected gold traces in a quartz sample collected a few miles farther east. Reports about their finds circulated, significantly boosting local exploration.⁹

The area's first meaningful mineral discovery occurred in 1903 when prospector Jack Horsfeld found gold on Beaver Creek, just west of the Canadian border. Yukon miners stampeded to the area, but most failed to locate workable ground and soon returned to Dawson City.¹⁰

Bratnober and Dalton explored the upper Tanana River region in 1903, using a pack-train to search for copper prospects. At the conclusion of their journey, however, Bratnober downplayed the district's mineral potential. His pessimistic forecast infuriated supporters of Valdez, which heavily depended on the mining trade. "This pot-bellied old reprobate,"

declared the *Valdez News*, "has some object in spreading these slanderous reports aside from

the mere pleasure that some people take in lying.”¹¹

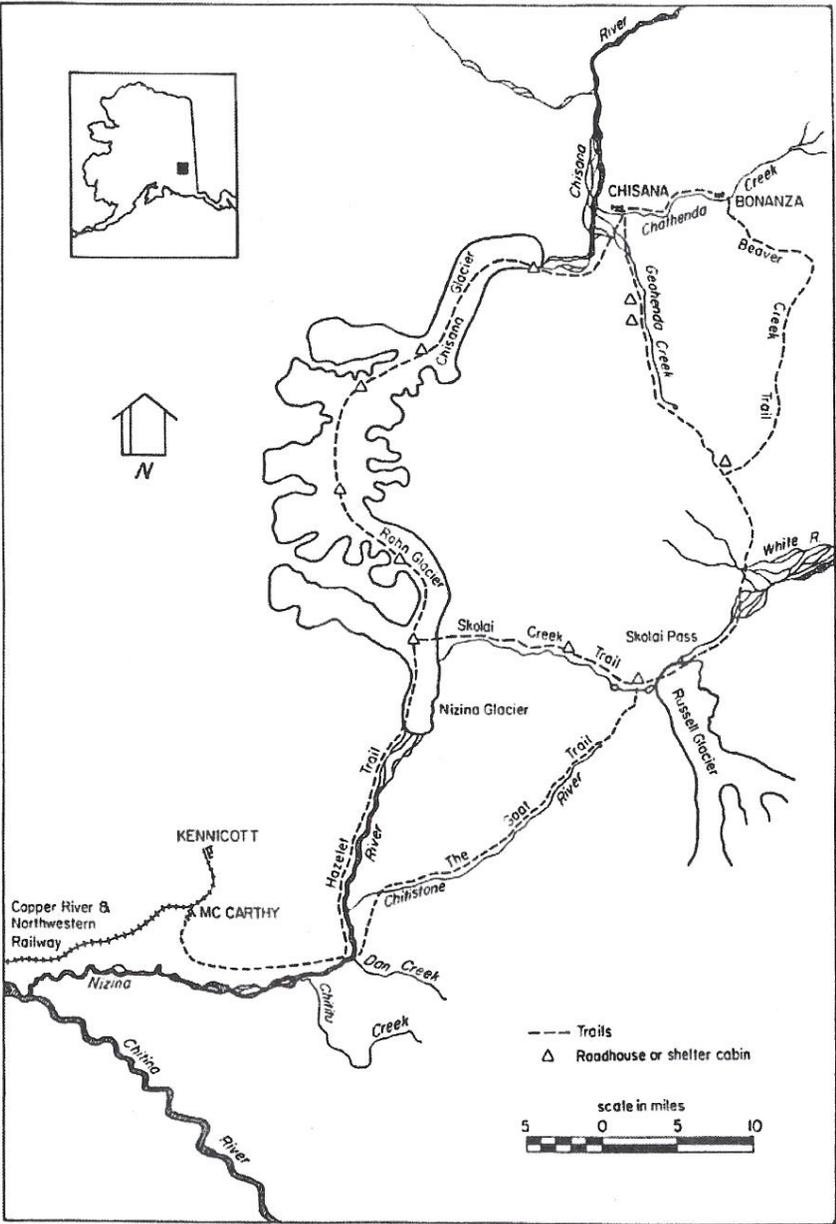


Figure 2: Chisana Region

steamers can proceed about fourteen miles above the mouth of the Klutasin and to the mouth of [Beaver Creek]. On the latter it is said poling boats can be taken within ten miles of the scene of the strike.¹⁹

Fairbanks boosters, of course, disputed the superiority of this Yukon passage. “The [White] River at best is only navigable to the head of the Donjek,” they cautioned, “and that point is 105 miles from the scene of the strike.” While they admitted that Dawson City was closer to the strike than Fairbanks, they warned that goods shipped through Canada were subject to customs duty at the border. The Tanana River, in contrast, was an “all-American” route.²⁰



Figure 9: Stampedeers crossing Dan Creek on their way to the Chisana.
Photo courtesy Lewis Levensaler Collection, Rasmuson Library,
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Most interior residents viewed the Tanana as the logical route to the diggings. Healy Lake trader William H. Newton, for example, claimed that from Tanana Crossing to the Chisana the water was “so slack that the wind will blow a boat upstream.” Newton warned, however, that swift water between Fairbanks and Tanana Crossing could inhibit travel: “The best way then would be to mush to Tanana Crossing, build a boat there, and pole to the near field.”²¹

W. H. Merritt also believed it would be relatively easy to ascend the Tanana.²² Hoping to capture some of the stampedeers’ business, Merritt tried to establish a trading post on the

10

Chisana River. Although he chartered the 101-ton *Dusty Diamond* to transport his freight, he failed to get anywhere near the Chisana district.²³

Large boats, however, continued trying to reach the goldfield. Most, including the *Tana*, the *Shushana*, the *White Seal*, the *Martha Clow*, the *Florence S.*, and the *Samson*, failed to reach even the Nabesna River.²⁴ The Northern Navigation Company's steamer *Reliance* got a little further, attaining the mouth of the Chisana and establishing the townsite of Reliance City.²⁵ Only a few smaller craft went up the Chisana River. The *Marathon* and the *Mabel* probably ascended the furthest, reaching a spot about six miles below the mouth of Scotty Creek where they founded Gasoline City.²⁶

Prospectors approached the Chisana from every possible direction. Most were poorly equipped and many lacked a clear concept of where they were headed. Consequently, many failed to arrive, and of those who did, few remained for more than a few days.²⁷



Figure 10: Some stamperers poled boats up Beaver Creek.
Photo courtesy D. D. Cairnes Collection, Earth Sciences Sector,
Natural Resources Canada, Ottawa

The experiences related by Gus Lepart and Tony Grisko were fairly typical of those approaching from the north. According to Lepart, he and Grisko

left Dawson with three others on July 27, and took a boat to the mouth of the White, whence we poled to the Donjek. Three of the boys left us there, and we bought their

outfit, and continued with five dogs. Grisko and I then poled up to near the canyon, and struck across country with each dog carrying thirty pounds and each man fifty pounds, with rifles and blankets on top. We cached goods on the river bank for our return, and, with the dogs, carried in enough on the one trip to keep us going for seven weeks that we were in the diggings, with the exception of about seventy-five dollars worth of grub which we bought at Chisana City. We got to Wilson Creek August 25.²⁸

For those coming from the south, the route up the Chitistone River was fast, but particularly risky. George Hazelet, who traversed it in mid-July 1913, described this so-called "goat trail" as

an extremely dangerous place for horses, . . . being simply a sheep trail widened to about two feet. The drop to the bottom is as much as two thousand feet in places and should horse or man lose his footing he could not stop till he reached the bottom.²⁹

Ruben Lindblom, who passed that way with his brother Hugo about the same time as Hazelet, recorded another commonly encountered peril:

Broke camp this morning intending to ford the river on foot as no parties with horses have shown up yet. We made our packs snug, tied our rifles to the packs so as to have our hands free, then cut a long pole and started abreast into the water The stream at this point was not very wide, about sixty yards or so. We had gotten half way over, with the water well above our waists when I went down, but the others kept their feet so I managed to get up again by holding onto the pole. The water was running swift, a great deal more so than it seemed to be when standing on the bank, and the gravel on the bottom was moving which made it well nigh impossible to keep ones feet from being washed from under him. We got straightened out once more . . . [but] had not taken but a few steps forward when we all seemed to go under at about the same time. I know I was under water some little distance before I saw daylight again but whenever I got partly straightened up the water would hit my pack and roll me over and over. But I kept kicking whenever my feet touched bottom and soon I stopped and found that I had ahold of Hugo and he was hanging onto me, both spitting out water and blowing like a porpoise. I glanced hurriedly down stream and saw Jacques with his arms around a block of ice which had stranded close to shore in shallow water. Mardi was just crawling out of the water on the opposite side of the river from the rest of us, and was so excited that he grabbed the hat off his head and threw it back into the water. Jacques and I lost our hats but Hugo saved his. We also lost a shovel. But we congratulated ourselves on getting thru with such a slight loss.³⁰

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FRANKLIN K. LANE, Secretary

UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
GEORGE OTIS SMITH, Director

BULLETIN 630

THE
CHISANA-WHITE RIVER DISTRICT
ALASKA

BY

STEPHEN R. CAEPPS



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Alaska Resources
Library & Information Services
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over this route in the winter of 1913-14 in competition with the much shorter Nizina-Chisana route, although the sledging distance is nearly three times as great, and many freighters are said to contemplate a change from that route to this one for future freighting.

DAWSON-WHITE RIVER ROUTE.

Many of the gold seekers in this district came from Dawson by way of White River. Freight may be taken by steamer up the Yukon to White River, a distance of about 70 miles, and by poling boats or shallow-draft power boats up White River as far as the mouth of Donjek River, or even in favorable stages of water to the mouth of Beaver Creek, and poling boats can be used to Canyon City, a village on White River a few miles east of the international boundary. From White River freight is taken in winter by sled to the placer mines. A winter trail has now been cut from the mouth of Beaver Creek to the point where that stream finally crosses the boundary into Alaska, and this route is said to offer no great difficulties, although the distance from Dawson is about 175 miles by boat to the mouth of Beaver Creek and about 85 miles overland from that point to the placer mines.

COFFEE CREEK ROUTE.

From the mouth of Coffee Creek, which joins the Yukon from the south 110 miles above Dawson, a good trail has been built to the junction of Beaver Creek with White River, a distance of about 80 miles, and another branch leads to Canyon City, 120 miles by trail from the Yukon. From the mouth of Beaver Creek the trail to the Chisana placer mines again reaches Beaver Creek at the international boundary, and thence proceeds up the creek to its head. The total distance by this trail from the Yukon to the town of Bonanza is about 160 miles.

WHITEHORSE-KLUANE LAKE ROUTE.

The route from Whitehorse, at the terminus of the White Pass & Yukon Route, to Canyon City, by way of Lake Klunane, is available for travel both in summer and winter, though the winter trail is shorter, as it crosses some bodies of water which the summer trail skirts. A wagon road has been built from Whitehorse to Lake Klunane, a distance of 143 miles, and a trail extends about 170 miles from the upper end of the lake to Canyon City, on White River, and thence 55 miles farther up Beaver Creek to the placer mines. The total overland distance by this route is about 368 miles in summer and perhaps 20 miles less in winter.

TANANA-CHISANA ROUTE.

On the circulation of the report that rich placer discoveries had been made in the Chisana basin, a considerable number of men made their way up Tanana and Chisana rivers by launches and small boats. Under favorable conditions launches may be taken up these rivers as far as the north front of the Nutzotin Mountains, and boats were lined or poled all the way up to the mouth of Chathenda Creek. The route from Fairbanks, the base of supplies, is, however, long and difficult and, although possible, will never be an economical route for bringing in supplies. In the fall of 1914 many persons availed themselves of this water route, and built boats in which they rowed downstream to Fairbanks.

ACCOMMODATIONS ON THE TRAILS.

Along all the most used trails to the gold fields there were, in 1913 and 1914, road houses at intervals of 15 to 30 miles, at which meals and lodging could be procured by the traveler. Thus along the Nizina-Chisana and Nizina-White River routes it was possible to travel from one road house to the next each day for the entire distance. On the Copper-Nabesna River route there are road houses along the Government military road as far as Gulkana. On the Whitehorse-Kluane Lake route road houses are maintained between Whitehorse and Klunane Lake, but none west of that portion of the trail. The rates charged at these road houses vary on the different routes and with the distance from established lines of transportation, but range from a minimum of \$1 a meal and \$1 for lodging to \$1.50 and \$2 a meal in the more remote parts of the region.

COST OF TRANSPORTATION.

The cost of travel by trail from steamship or railroad points to the placer mines varies so greatly with the route traveled and the method of travel used that no comprehensive statement of the expense involved can be made here. For the man who travels afoot, carries his own bed and simple and compact food, prepares his own meals, and sleeps out, the cost is little more than the value of his time while on the way. For the man who rents or purchases a horse and stops at the road houses, the expense depends to a great degree on the time spent in reaching his destination. For parties that travel by pack train, carrying their own camping outfit and provisions, the cost is much the same as for the same length of time spent on any other Alaska trail. The regular scheduled rates for first-class passengers on the steamship lines from Seattle to Skagway in 1914 was \$30 and to Cordova \$45. By rail from Skagway to Whitehorse the

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May, 1979
Report prepared by
Terrence M. Cole
Historian

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foot. Tetlin Indians claimed that they could go up the Nabesna and across to the Chisana, on foot, in three days, while it would take five days to pole up the Chisana. Some of these Indians were hired by the stamperers, some of whom took the Chisana route, others by way of the Nabesna. (Fairbanks Daily Times, 8/19/13)

The manager of the Northern Commercial Company, Mr. Coleman, who went along with the Reliance said the worst water in the Tanana River was between Johnson and Robinson Rivers, below Tanana Crossing. In his opinion, there was little use "in any gasoline boats trying to make the trip" to the Chisana because of that stretch of bad water (Fairbanks Daily Times, 8/19/13).

Despite the fact that the Reliance had reached the mouth of the Nabesna and the Chisana, there seemed little use to the company in the boat ascending the Tanana again. Although some people were ascending the Chisana in poling boats from the mouth to the gold discovery--and others were going up the Nabesna River and the Nabesna trail--the townsite of Reliance did not seem to have a great future as an outfitting center. It was not easy to get up the Tanana, and the trail from Gulkana to Chisana on the old Indian portage route was becoming more popular. It was predicted that the Gulkana trail would become the logical route for stamperers in the coming winter, and one party on the trail was able to use wagons all the way to the head of Platinum Creek in the Nabesna Valley (Fairbanks Daily Times, 8/28/13; 8/15/13).

The day after the Reliance returned to Fairbanks, the manager of the Northern Navigation Company announced that the sternwheeler would be returned to the Koyukuk River route and would not make another trip to the Nabesna River (Fairbanks Daily Times, 8/20/13). But interest in the Chisana district was increasing daily, and heedless of the Northern Navigation report, it was said that the White Pass Railroad might build an extension to the Chisana. J. B. Close, the son of Chairman Close of the White Pass, was on his way into the Chisana to inspect the strike, although no indication was given of a possible railroad route (Fairbanks Daily Times, 8/19/13).

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

22

The steamer Tana carrying a "full load" of freight and passengers, proceeded as far up the Tanana River to the Chisana diggings as the boat could possible get. Captain Langley thought the trip of the Tana was "very successful" when "he was able to push his boat to a point within 9 miles of the junction of the Chisana and Nabesna rivers, and he put his 90 passengers ashore at that point, all greatly pleased with the treatment that had been accorded them" (Fairbanks Daily Times, 9/25/13).

The steamer Shushana on the other hand only got within "50 miles of the mouth of Nabesna and unloaded its passengers and cargo there. All of the stamperders who went in on the boat were reported as being greatly dissatisfied with the treatment accorded them" (Fairbanks Daily Times, 9/12/13).

Many of the other boats did not even get within 50 miles of the mouth of the Nabesna or Reliance City. The steamer White Seal was carrying a load of stamperders, 20 tons of merchandise, and a barge to "be left at the head of navigation and used as a store" (Fairbanks Daily Times, 9/3/13). Also on board was a two-kilowatt wireless station owned by Fairbanks promoter Falcon Joslin, which was to be set up on the mouth of Chathenda Creek on the Chisana River. The manager of the wireless for Joslin, E. E. Dilley, was in charge of transporting the station from "whatever point water traffic becomes impossible," to the diggings. Dilley and the rest of the passengers on the White Seal believed that "the boat will land them, in any event; at the mouth of the Nabesna. The wireless plant will then be sent up that river in poling boats, if possible, and if not, the Dilley teams will take of it" (Fairbanks Daily Times, 9/2/13).

The White Seal was unable to ascend the Tanana River very far at all. Partly because it had left late in the season, the White Seal was put in winter quarters about 45 miles below Tanana Crossing. The wireless plant did not get to the Chisana (Fairbanks Daily Times, 11/16/13).

When navigation on the Tanana closed for the year in October, at least six sternwheelers were known to be frozen in on the Upper Tanana River: the Martha Clow, the Tana, the White Seal, the Florence S., the Samson, and the Tetlin. All of these boats had been bound for the Chisana. Of these six sternwheelers, only the Tana, which had gotten within 9 miles of the mouth of the Nabesna, and the Tetlin, which was "hopelessly high and dry on a bar" some distance up the Nabesna River, were able to land their passengers and cargo reasonably near to Reliance City. Despite the fact that relatively few boats had reached the mouth of the Nabesna, by late September there was still a large stock of supplies at Reliance City, left by the passengers on the Reliance and other boats.

This freight was hauled up the Chisana River closer to the diggings by several people. The steamer Marathon, which was built in Fairbanks by two men, with a steam engine taken from a White Automobile, had "excellent success" on the Chisana River. The Marathon made many runs up from

Reliance City on the Tanana River, to a spot about 6 miles below the mouth of Scotty Creek on the Chisana called "Gasoline City." It was called Gasoline City "because Tom Dodds reached that far upstream in his motor boat" (Fairbanks Daily Times, 10/8/13).

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

One of the owners of the steamer Marathon, R. E. Leber, explained later that the great metropolis of the lower Chisana had a new name.

Mr. Leber stated last evening that the name of Gasoline City had been changed, and that it was now called Shucklinville, after its most enterprising citizen, Sam Shucklin. Mr. Shucklin freighted all of his goods to the new settlement, which boasts of a population of 150, and everybody seems to be happy. Of the 150 inhabitants two are women who found passage on one of the upriver boats. The settlement is about six miles below the mouth of Scotty Creek. Reliance City is now a deserted settlement, only two people remaining there (Fairbanks Daily Times, 10/14/13).

Another boat which ran up the Chisana River to Gasoline City near Scotty Creek was the 40-foot long sternwheeler Mabel. The Mabel was a gasoline boat driven by a 15-horsepower engine. The boat was owned by Martin Moran and P. Flannigan of Iditarod, and left Fairbanks on September 1, 1913, carrying a "large outfit" for the owners and their four passengers, Bert Kennedy, Dave Early, Ben Howland, and Otto Moses. The Mabel was pushing a forty-foot-long barge, and both the barge and the boat were loaded down with a full and complete winter's outfit for six men" (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 9/1/13).

The Mabel first attempted to ascend the Chena Slough above Fairbanks to Thirtymile House, "from which point it will be dragged over the sand, if necessary, into the waters of the Tanana" (Fairbanks Daily Times, 9/2/13). However, the Chena River was too low for the Mabel to get near the Tanana River, so the little boat descended the Chena to its mouth, and began the long journey up the Tanana and Chisana rivers to the new goldfields.

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

The Mabel and her 40-foot barge had wintered at Gasoline City. The six men on the Mabel had used the barge as their winter living quarters. In the fall of 1913 she had made the trip from Fairbanks to Gasoline City in 23 days, which was excellent time considering that it was

already the first week of September when she had left Fairbanks, and that the boat had also been pushing a 40-foot barge. The Mabel had made it farther upstream than many of the other boats which had left much earlier in the season (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 5/19/14).

In addition to Reliance City at the mouth of the Chisana, and Gasoline City, at the mouth of Scottie Creek, the stamperders staked a more permanent townsite on Chathenda Creek, which was variously called Chisana City or Johnson City, and was the major distribution point for the district. The townsite was a mile and a half from the Chisana River, and about seven miles from the original strike. By October of 1913, two avenues were laid out in Johnson City and most of the townsite lots were claimed by stakers. Johnson City was later described as being "quite a town" with nine or ten stores (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 6/1/14). In 1914, there were for a time 400 people at Johnson City and the townsite consisted of about "150 log cabins scattered along Chathenda Creek," two sawmills, a post office, restaurants, stores, and other structures (Fairbanks Daily Times, 5/19/14; Capps 1916: 22).

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

Many men in poling boats did ascend the Chisana in 1913 to the mouth of Chathenda Creek, more than 113 miles above the mouth of the Chisana River. It was noted in a USGS report describing the stampede that "under favorable conditions launches may be taken up these rivers (Chisana and Tanana) as far as the north front of the Nutzotin Mountains, and boats were lined or poled all the way up to the mouth of Chathenda Creek" (Capps 1916:27).

Two men who were lost poled down the Chisana on their way home from the gold stampede, thinking it was the Donjek River. About 40 miles below the diggings they built a raft and came down stream. "They reported that they could have built the raft a number of miles farther upstream," the Fairbanks Daily Times stated, "and could have made the whole trip from within 15 miles of the diggings by water" (Fairbanks Daily Times, 9/21/13).

When the sternwheeler Mabel returned from the Chisana in the spring of 1914, the Fairbanks Times reported what they had learned of the district from Captain Flannigan, and of the poling boat traffic on the Chisana River.

When the Mabel left Johnson City (Chisana City) the population of the settlement was about 400. The majority of these, however, anticipated returning to Fairbanks as soon as possible. Many of those who went in by way of Dawson and the coast routes will return by the Tanana, coming down in small boats.

Although but few of the stamperders had left Chisana before Captain Flannigan, he states that his boat passed at least twenty poling boats along the river. It is estimated that the first of the poling boats should reach the end of Cushman Street sometime today (Fairbanks Daily Times, 5/19/14).

The time it took to go from Chisana City to Fairbanks in a poling boat was usually at least a week or longer, depending on the state of the river. In the summer of 1914, Andy Harkeom reached Fairbanks after he had been "eight days out with a poling boat from Chisana City in the Chisana district" (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 7/11/14). Though some polers put their boats in the water on the Chisana near the mouth of Chathenda Creek, as Harkeom apparently did, others started their journey by water at Gasoline City. There was an overland trail from Johnson City to Gasoline City, and in the spring of 1914, a crowd of men waited at the latter place to put their boats on the river. On the return of the Mabel to Fairbanks in May, 1914, it was reported that an armada of poling boats, manned by disappointed gold seekers, were waiting for the ice to go out. The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported on May 19, 1914:

At least 25 poling boats are coming down from Gasoline City, the point of departure over the trail to Johnson City in the Chisana, and many of these boats will reach here in the next day or two. Camps of the returning prospectors are to be found scattered all along the Tanana coming down river. The ice is not entirely out of the river yet, rendering small boat navigation dangerous (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 5/19/14).

That same day one of the first polers, Charles Martin, arrived in Fairbanks. When asked what was going on at Johnson City when he left there in April, he said, "Nothing: There was a large bunch of them sitting around peddling to each other, but that is about all they have to do. Gasoline City is deserted" (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 5/19/14).

Martin then described the long trip down the river.

Martin Kambish and I came down in one boat, Walter Fisher and Otto F. Kroehle in another. We were the last to leave Gasoline City and since the 4th day of May we have been sitting in a boat or camping trying to get back to Fairbanks. It's a long trip when you have to float down in a boat following the ice out, believe me. There is a large crowd coming down and every day now you'll see them drifting in here. Those that I now recall are Teddy Anderson, the Theis boys, Bob Blakely, Pete Henry, Bob Cosick, Van Sant, Buckhorst, and Reese. Can't remember the names of the rest. (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 5/19/14)

The Tanana River was extremely hazardous to descend in a poling boat. Teddy Anderson almost lost his life in one mishap on the river, and for a few days there was a "wrecked poling boat mystery" on the Tanana. Dan McDonald and Charlie Slater, two men who carried the mail up the river in a small boat, spotted a wrecked poling boat about one mile above the Salcha River. McDonald said it was a "new one of the flat-bottomed, square-end type and rather small." Everyone was wondering as to whom the boat belonged. Some people were afraid that it was the boat of Teddy Anderson. Charlie Martin said that Anderson's boat had been saved, but he added that he knew of other boats of that type.

. . . . Martin states that he knew of four boats of the same type that left Gasoline City, three of which are still unaccounted for. One boat the two Paddies brought down. Reese and Cusick had such a boat, Pete Henry had one, and Bob Blakely and Van Sant constructed one. Reese and Cusick expected to prospect the Robinson and Johnson (rivers) on their way down. Pete Henry didn't expect to get here soon and Blakely and Van Sant are not planning to come down until July. All of these men are experienced in running the river.

Joe Richardson built a boat of the same type at Broken Heart on the Shushana River, but it could not possibly have come down so soon. Then there was another new one at Gasoline City, used as a ferry. This list accounts for practically all the new boats made by the stampedeers on their return . . . Those boats which came down from Tanana Crossing are all reported to have reached Fairbanks in safety and were of the Whitehorse type, a pointed bow and flat stern (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 5/22/14).

There is no accurate count of the number of disappointed gold stampedeers who waited for the ice to go out in the spring of 1914 and floated down the river, just as there is no reliable count of the number of people who stampeded to the Chisana in the first place. Though there were reports of several thousand miners in the area, the Geological Survey estimated that not more than 500 or 600 men were in the district at any one time (Capps 1916:22). As often happened in Alaskan gold camps, the original reports of the wealth of the Chisana were wildly exaggerated. Though there was gold in the Chisana watershed, it was certainly not another Klondike.

It was not only the disappointed gold seekers who were poling their way back to Fairbanks, but also miners who were following rumors of strikes on other streams in the upper Tanana valley, such as the short-lived 1914 stampede to Johnson River. A fake letter telling of a rich gold discovery on Johnson River was posted outside the bunkhouse of Harry Hamshaw, a big mining operator on the Chisana, and it touched off the stampede. One night, 29 men who worked for Hamshaw quit their jobs and started downstream for Johnson River. Many, if not all of them, went by poling boat. One group that joined the fake stampede

later told of how they came down the Chisana River, probably putting their boats in the water near the mouth of the Chathenda Creek.

Closing up their affairs in the Chisana as quickly as possible, Compton, Byron Arnold, George Harwood, William Upton, Clarence Atkinson and Jimmy Brennan started for the scene of the new strike. They left Johnson City on the 14th of July, and as the water was very high at that time, the trip down the Chisana River was a perilous one. While near Silent City, on the Chisana River, the men lost their boats and entire outfits. They then picked up another boat and started on again (Fairbanks Daily Times, 8/6/14).

Though some of the men in poling boats carried out valuable furs and any gold they had mined (Fairbanks Daily Times, 5/20/14), much of the ore from the Chisana was going out across the mountains from the White River through Skolai Pass to the Copper River drainage, and down to McCarthy on the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad. The trail to McCarthy was far shorter than the difficult boat trip to Fairbanks and by connecting with what was then Alaska's only major standard gauge railroad, passengers or freight could be hauled with ease directly to tidewater. One man who returned from the Chisana in 1914 further explained:

The greater part of the gold from the Chisana is being shipped out to McCarthy and the coast towns. One reason for this is that the men who are taking out the gold consider the McCarthy route the best to the Chisana, and another one is that the coast towns have boosted consistently for the new camp (Fairbanks Daily Times, 8/5/14).

Yet despite the fact that the shorter transportation route to the Copper River drainage was being utilized more as men became familiar with the area, the Tanana continued to be a major artery for traffic to and from the Chisana district through 1914. The poling boat traffic was in fact so heavy on the Tanana River with miners coming down from the Chisana, that the Commercial Club in Fairbanks suggested putting up a big sign on the Tanana River to let the boatmen know when they were approaching the city. Like an exit sign on an expressway, the marker was supposed to let a boatman know when to get off the river. A year later the Commercial Club finally did erect a sign on the Tanana to alert the boat traffic, a "majestic finger pointing the way to Fairbanks" (Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 5/27/15).

One boat which headed for the Chisana during the 1913 stampede was a scow specially built by John Enlund in Fairbanks to haul a saw mill to the new diggings. The boat was a "particularly well-built one," and Enlund estimated that when loaded it would not draw more than eight inches of water. The scow was 56-feet long, 13½-feet beam, with a roof over it and sleeping quarters in the bow. It had a 40-horsepower engine and a 50-horsepower boiler, and Enlund expected to haul an 11 ton outfit with it (Fairbanks Daily Times, 8/21/13; 8/16/13).

Another boat designed especially for the Chisana stampede was the steamer S & S, built by John Strelie and Earl Slippern for the purpose of taking a sawmill and a lodging house outfit to the new diggings (Fairbanks Daily Times, 9/19/13). One unique feature of the S & S was that "the engine that is to be used for the sawmill has been installed for the locomotion of the boat" (Fairbanks Daily Times, 9/19/13).

Though it is not known at present how far up the river the Enlund scow and the S & S proceeded with their loads, two sawmills were in operation at Chisana City in 1915, charging somewhat less than \$150 for a thousand feet (Capps 1916:19).

Since there are few accurate statistics available, it is difficult to make any definitive statements on the volume of traffic from Fairbanks which went up the Chisana River. The Tanana River itself above Fairbanks was not easy to negotiate in a riverboat or a sternwheeler, but for two years at least, 1913 and 1914, the route was used consistently by a large number of men coming to or going from the Chisana mining district. Poling boats were regularly taken 113 miles up the Chisana River to the mouth of Chathenda Creek, near Johnson City. Geologist Stephen Capps noted in 1916 that even though it was possible to carry freight and supplies to the upper Chisana by water, it was easier to go overland on one of several routes across the mountains to connect with the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad. Capps wrote,

On the circulation of the report that rich placer discoveries had been made in the Chisana basin, a considerable number of men made their way up Tanana and Chisana rivers by launches and small boats. Under favorable conditions launches may be taken up these rivers as far as the north front of the Nutzotin Mountains, and boats were lined or poled all the way up to the mouth of the Chathenda Creek. The route from Fairbanks, the base of supplies, is, however, long and difficult and, although possible, will never be an economical route for bringing in supplies. In the fall of 1914 many persons availed themselves of this water route, and built boats in which they rowed downstream to Fairbanks (Capps 1916:27).

The first full year of mining in the Chisana was also the peak year for gold production. In 1914 the miners in the Chisana took out a quarter of a million dollars in gold. The next year it dropped to \$160,000 and by 1916 the yearly production was \$40,000. The richest placer mines were worked out during the first year. Most miners in the Chisana worked with picks and shovels. Because the area was so remote little machinery could be brought in to recover the gold more efficiently (Capps 1916:94).

Mining was the major economic activity in the Upper Chisana, but even when the gold production plummeted, a trader continued to live in Chisana City. According to Milton Bennett Medary, a hunter who visited the old gold rush town in 1924 on horseback, Chisana was a city of

"452 log cabins in which one man lives alone. Many of the cabins have fallen in or rotted away or been used for firewood in the winter..." (Medary 1924:14).

Medary wrote in his diary, "the man who lived in this deserted city in the forest brings supplies and sells them" to the few miners left in the district, and delivers the mail once a month. The trader was identified by Medary as "Old man Simon" (Medary 1924:14).

Anthropologist Robert McKennan, who made an extensive study of the Upper Tanana Indians in 1929, said that the population of Chisana that year was seven people, six men and one woman. McKennan said that despite the small number of people living in the area, Chisana had a monthly mail service from Chitina, an outside contact denied to the rest of the region (McKennan 1959:26). The trader living at Chisana, however, died in the fall of 1929, and the community was no longer even a minor commercial center. As McKennan explained,

With the exception of this small mining community and two or three white trappers, the resident white population of the upper Tanana consisted of a few fur traders. Up to the fall of 1929 there was one located at Chisana. With his death it became necessary for the Indians of the Chisana and Nabesna basins to trade at the posts on the Copper River, the nearest, that at Slana River, being about 100 miles from Chisana and 60 miles from Nabesna (McKennan 1959:26).

McKennan believed that the entire upper Tanana culture centered around a "nomadic, hunting existence" (McKennan 1959:32). The "accepted mode of water travel" for the Indians was the birch bark canoe. The canoes were 12 to 16 feet long, 2 feet wide, and "extremely shallow." Since they only weighed about 40 pounds, the canoes were very easy to carry from one lake to another. "Such canoes are extremely cranky," McKennan wrote, "and are capable of carrying but one or two persons" (McKennan 1959:93).

For carrying heavier loads and crossing streams the Natives used boats, which were similar to the canoes except they were deeper, wider, and heavier. McKennan described the boats of the upper Tanana Indians, which resembled the Eskimo umiats.

A typical skin boat measures 17 feet in length, 4 feet in width, and 2 feet in depth. The frame is covered with moose or caribou skin, the hide being untanned but with the hair removed. Such boats were capable of transporting a dozen or more people. They are propelled by several paddles on each side and steered by another paddle in the hands of a helmsman (McKennan 1959:93).

Occasionally the Natives also used rafts, which consisted of from six to ten logs, that were lashed together with crosspieces and willow withes (McKennan 1959:94).

Trading posts which predated the Chisana stampede had been established in the upper Tanana by Captain Northway in 1909 and 1910, and by W.H. Newton at the mouth of the Nabesna in 1912. McKennan noted that from 1912 on, there was at least one trading post at the mouth of the Nabesna (McKennan 1959:25). For many years the owner of one of the Nabesna trading posts was John Hajdukovich, but there were three other traders at Nabesna in business at the same time including Milo Hajdukovich, a distant cousin of John, Capt. Flannigan, and Herman Kessler (Lowell 1979:8).

At one time John Hajdukovich owned at least nine boats which he used in connection with his trading activities in the upper Tanana region. He also had a total of at least eight motorboat engines, which ranged from a 75-horsepower Graymarine engine, to several six-horsepower kickers. A list of his boating equipment, which is located in the Hajdukovich Collection at the University of Alaska Archives in Fairbanks, gives the descriptions and values of his watercraft as follows:

1 boat with 75 horse power Gray engine	\$2500.00
1 boat with 50 horse power Redwing engine	2000.00
1 boat with 40 horse power Redwing engine	1500.00
1 30 horse power Gray engine	400.00
1 Hull, 50 ft. long	300.00
1 55 ft. long (hull)	250.00
3 poling boats	400.00
3 6-horse power motors	175.00
1 14 horse power motor	175.00
1 poling boat	40.00
Total value	<u>\$7965.00</u>

According to Ted Lowell, who worked for Hajdukovich from 1929 to 1935, they regularly used a 30-foot-long freight boat with a twelve-horsepower kicker to haul supplies 54 miles up the Chisana River to Scottie Creek. Lowell personally hauled freight by riverboat up as far as Scottie Creek, and was paid \$1800 a year by Hajdukovich (Lowell 1979:22).

In a 30-foot-freight boat Lowell says he could haul close to a ton and a half of supplies. In the spring of every year he would bring a load of supplies up the Chisana River to trade with the Natives at the mouth of Scottie Creek. He would spread his trading goods out in a clearing on the ground, and the Scottie Creek band of Natives would gather there to trade. Some of the Indians came from the Yukon Territory with furs to trade. "I'd stay there a couple of days," Lowell said, "and in fact I'd sell out everything I had in the boat, and could have sold the boat too" (Lowell 1979:10).

Robert McKennan said that the Scottie Creek band of natives was composed of about 25 people. "They had no permanent camps of any kind," McKennan wrote, "but wandered over territory from the mouth of the Gardiner Creek on the Tanana to the mouth of the Snag River on the White. Of all the bands they adhered most closely to their original nomadic form of living" (McKennan 1959:18).

In addition to making regular trips up the Chisana to trade with the Scottie Creek natives, Lowell said that Hajdukovich also had a small trading cabin down river from Scottie Creek at Gardiner Creek, about 34 miles above the mouth of the Chisana.

A competing trader, Herman Kessler, also had a post about ten miles above the mouth of Gardiner Creek on the main Chisana River. Lowell said that Kessler always traded up at Gardiner Creek with his boat, a forty-foot freight boat with a fifty-horsepower Redwing engine. Kessler hauled his supplies upriver and brought his furs downriver with his forty-foot boat, which Lowell estimated probably drew about six inches of water (Lowell 1979:9).

On two occasions Ted took one of Hajdukovich's large 6-ton motor boats filled with a load of supplies to the Gardiner Creek cabin. These large freight boats, like Kessler's, drew about six inches of water. Occasionally during periods of high water, the larger boats could be used along the Chisana River between Gardiner Creek, 34 miles above the mouth of the Chisana, and Scottie Creek, 54 miles above the mouth of the Chisana.

But all of the rivers, even the Tanana, were difficult to negotiate during low water (Lowell 1979:5). The major resource harvested by the fur traders and trappers were muskrats, but lynx, otter, fox, wolf, and beaver were also trapped. Lowell says that the area around Nabesna and up to Scottie Creek was "good rat country." During one year the traders took about 30,000 muskrats from the region.

The natives often used small 30-foot boats and canoes on the little lakes on which they trapped. Muskrats which were shot were not worth as much as trapped muskrats, so only towards the end of the spring when the ice was rotting, would the natives shoot their muskrats. On the lakes on which they could use a canoe, the natives would have their boats in the water even when there was still ice left in the middle of the lake. They would paddle around the outside of the lake in the open water and hunt the rats from their canoes (Lowell 1979:29).

Lowell remembers that one night he was going to see a friend, and he dropped off Steve Northway on a small lake. When Lowell came by with his boat the next morning, Northway had 110 muskrats. The price paid for the muskrats by the traders varied tremendously according to the fur markets in Seattle. During the depression three muskrats were only worth one dollar, but when times were better the traders paid as much as two dollars a piece for them (Lowell 1979:15).

The work carried on by traders in the upper Tanana was summarized and its effect evaluated by McKennan.

Two rival traders, Ted Lowell and Milo Hajdukovich, operated stores at Tanana Crossing, Tetlin, and the mouth of the Nabesna. Goods were brought in during the summer in power-driven, shallow draught scows and distributed to these

three posts. In the winter the traders drove by dog team to their various stores where the Indians came in to meet them, and on occasion they drove to the more distant camps. During the spring when the Indians were muskrat hunting, the traders journeyed from camp to camp via outboard motors. There was also a trader, Herman Kissler (sic), farther up the Tanana near the mouth of Gardiner Creek, who dealt largely with the Scottie Creek band. Since considerable credit was extended, the Natives enjoyed taking advantage of the rivalry between the white men and became very shrewd in playing one against the other. The Natives received good prices for their skins, but they were paid in trade and prices for goods were high. Such trade contacts had naturally altered the native economy profoundly, with the result that canvas tents, sheet-iron stoves, cloth clothing, modern rifles, etc., had displaced their Native counterparts. To a certain extent, however, such influence was largely superficial. The difficulties of transportation favored small, expensive articles such as clothing, beads, or the like rather than bulky items such as flour; thus it was much more profitable for the trader to handle expensive luxuries such as portable phonographs or ladies rayon bloomers than the bulkier and cheaper goods ordinarily regarded as necessities of life (McKenna 1959: 26-27).

In all of the years he traded and lived in the upper Tanana, Ted Lowell never went up the Chisana past the mouth of Scottie Creek, either by dogteam in the winter or boat in the summer. Scottie Creek was clearly the upstream range of the sphere of influence of the lower river trading posts.

However there was and still is regular boat traffic on the Chisana above Scottie Creek. Walter Northway, who said he was 98 years old in 1975, stated:

I have traveled up the Chisana River by river boat all my life, first with my folks and later by myself and with my family, for hunting, hauling supplies to our camps and our house at 10-Mile. We also go up river to stay at our fish camp. We go up much further than the mouth of Scotty (sic) Creek (Northway 1975).

Informant, Roy F. Sam of Northway, said: "I have also travelled up the Chisana River, about 90 river miles up, starting at Northway Village. Every year most of my life we go up Chisana River by motor boat, many times past the mouth of Mirror Creek" (Sam 1975). Mirror Creek is about 61 miles above the mouth of the Chisana River and about seven miles upstream from Scottie Creek. Stewart Albert, another Northway native, said:

I have traveled up the Chisana River by motor boat many times a year, all my life. With my folks when I was small.

For fishing and hunting. I have been up further than the mouth of Scotty (sic) Creek.

I have helped other people haul supplies up to camps and cabins along the river (Albert 1975).

With the construction of the Alaska Highway during World War II, the "natural route" into the Interior of Alaska was finally utilized as a transportation corridor, from the Canadian border down the Chisana Valley to the Tanana Valley and Richardson Highway. The Alcan was the first overland connection between Alaska and the continental United States. The highway greatly increased access to the Chisana and its right bank tributaries below Scottie Creek. On the upper river, however, the highway had much less effect. In the early 1940's shortly before the Alaska Highway was completed, geologist Fred Moffit noted, "A trail from Chisana down the Chisana River was formerly in use, but has been traveled so little in recent years that it is now almost obliterated" (Moffit 1943:110).

By the early 1950's it was said that the gold placers of the Chisana mining district were "nearly worked out." (Moffit 1954:196). According to one account the last of the natives living on the upper Chisana, moved to Northway in 1951, and the total population of old Chisana City was five people in 1964 (Johnson 1966: 31-33). A 1972 report on the wilderness and scenic resources of the Wr. gold placers stated that the Chisana River was "suitable for water sports," but at present little other information is available on its recreational potential (Gaw 1972: 79).

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REPORT ON NAVIGABILITY
of
STREAMS TRIBUTARY TO THE TANANA RIVER, ALASKA



REPORT ON NAVIGABILITY
of
STREAMS TRIBUTARY TO THE TANANA RIVER, ALASKA

Prepared for
U. S. Army Engineer District, Alaska

by

GRUMMAN ECOSYSTEMS CORPORATION

April, 1975

3.1.1.1.2 (Continued)

settlement was not established until 1913. The first settlement was located about seven miles northwest of present-day Chisana.

3.1.2 Early River Usage

From its volume of water, length of course, and its commercial relations, the Tanana is far the most important tributary of the Yukon. First navigated in its lower reaches in 1893, it was opened to Chena in 1898, and there has been regular summer navigation since 1901 to Fairbanks, about 220 miles up the river. Occasional steamboats have carried supplies up the Tanana to Delta River, and one reached the junction of the Nabesna, 550 miles from the mouth of the Tanana. If mineral developments should ever justify, the Tanana and its main upper fork, the Chisana, could be navigated by very light-draft boats for a distance of about 600 miles.

Harper and Bates, pioneer traders on the Yukon, were, so far as history records, the first white men to explore the Tanana. They started from Harper's post at Fetutlin (now called Eagle City) at the mouth of Mission creek, a few miles below the Canadian boundary line on the Yukon in the summer of 1875, crossed over by the Indian trail to the Tanana, built a raft and floated down to the confluence of the Tanana with the Yukon. Later, in 1878, Harper and Al Mayo, ascended the Tanana for about two hundred miles, but neither party made maps or published any account of their journey.

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REPORT ON NAVIGABILITY

of

STREAMS TRIBUTARY TO THE TANANA RIVER, ALASKA

Prepared for

U. S. Army Engineer District, Alaska

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Alaska Resources
Library & Information Services
Anchorage Alaska

by

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April, 1975

4.1 (Continued)

Chisana River

o The Chisana River, forming the left fork of the Tanana River, is one of the Tanana's largest tributaries. Extending from the foot of the Chisana Glacier, 66 miles due south of Northway, in the northeastern Wrangell Mountains, the Chisana River flows first northeast, then northwest to the Tanana River near Northway Junction. The Chisana drains an area of 3,420 square miles over its 120.5 mile course. The river, being of glacial origin is highly braided and heavily silted, and flow is very forceful. The Chisana Basin is approximately 90 miles long and 50 miles across its maximum east-west extension. The river is about 600 feet wide near its mouth, where it reaches a depth of 13 feet. The Chisana River discharges an average flow of 2,430 cfs.

o The Chisana River is frozen 6 to 7 months of the year.

o The open flows of the Chisana River are similar to those of the Nabesna, reaching a maximum in July when the daytime temperatures are the warmest and glacial melt is the most rapid. Because the Chisana flows through an extensive area of black spruce muskeg and bog lakes, the flow of the river becomes "filtered", and is not as

4.1 (Continued)

variable as in the upper reach, where the gradient is steep and runoff is excessive. Open summer flows are often 3 to 4 times the average flow, while winter flows are only 20 percent of average.

o Where boatable, the Chisana River is practically usable for nearly 5 months, from mid May through September.

o Pertinent facts relating to the Chisana River are discussed at length under various headings in the following referenced sections. Those discussions are not included herein:

- 2.2 Principal Drainage
- 2.8 Water Resources
 - 2.8.3 Major Rivers
- 2.9.4 Power
 - 2.9.4.1 Chisana River
- 2.12 Streamflow Statistics
 - 2.12.1 Daily Records
 - 2.12.2 Crest-stage Partial-record Station Data
 - 2.12.4 Flood Records
 - 2.12.4.1 Flood Frequency
 - 2.12.4.2 Summary of Peak Stages and Discharges
- 3.1 Historical Development
 - 3.1.1 Regional Economic Development

4.1 (Continued)

3.1.1.1.2 Nabesna Native Group

3.1.2 Early River Usage

3.2.3 Recreational Usage

3.2.5 Usage Classification

3.2.6 Scenic Usage

6.0 River Profiles

7.0 Index of Crossings

o Chisana River characteristics pertinent to navigability consideration, and discussed elsewhere, are highlighted below:

- possible historic commercial river usage in hauling gold downstream to Fairbanks
- early river usage by Nabesna Natives and early white prospectors
- Nabesna Native village of Chisana located near mile 60 on river
- relatively shallow river gradient below Scottie Creek, mile 54.2
- apparent boatability to mouth of Mirror Creek, mile 61.2
- present-day river usage unknown
- designated as a potential unit in Alaska's Wild and Scenic Rivers System

4.1 (Continued)

- potential exists for recreational usage in form of boating, fishing, hunting and hiking
- area included within boundaries of proposed Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Wrangell National Forest
- potential for commercial shipment of freight not likely.

o The Chisana River previously has had an undetermined navigability classification, not being ruled as such in a State or Federal court decision.

o The Chisana River is recommended, as of this date, to be determined navigable to the mouth of Mirror Creek, mile 61.2.

o Subsequent paragraphs present a two-reach analysis of the Chisana River, moving downstream from its headwaters.

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REPORT ON NAVIGABILITY
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Prepared for
U. S. Army Engineer District, Alaska

by

GRUMMAN ECOSYSTEMS CORPORATION

April, 1975

TANANA

NAVIGABILITY INFORMATION REFERENCE FORMAT

for

SIGNIFICANT WATERWAYS

<u>Information</u>	<u>Summary Data</u>
◦ Name of Waterbody	Chisana River
◦ Tributary to:	Tanana River
◦ Physical Characteristics:	Length: 120.5 miles D.A.: 3420 sq. miles Width at mouth: 600 ft. Depth at mouth: 13 ft.
Approximate Discharge Volume:	2430 cfs
Fall per mile:	15.2 fpm
Description of improvements to navigability:	none
◦ Nature and location of significant obstructions to navigation in portions of the waterbody used or potentially capable of use in interstate commerce:	Pages 4-489 through 4-512
◦ Authorized Projects:	none
◦ Past or present interstate commerce:	not known
◦ Potential use for interstate commerce, if applicable:	none
◦ Nature of jurisdiction known to have been exercised by Federal Agencies, if any:	designated as a potential unit in Alaska's Wild and Scenic Rivers System
◦ State of Federal court decisions relating to navigability of the waterbody, if any:	none
◦ Finding of Navigability (with date) and recommendation for determination:	navigable to mile 61.2 (April 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FOREST, LAND AND WATER MANAGEMENT

THE FILES

March 2, 1979

RICHARD O. STERN
Historian *ROS*

Nabesna/Chisana Rivers-
Interviews with Ted Lowell

On Tuesday February 20th and Wednesday February 21, 1979 Mr. Ted Lowell was interviewed by Richard Stern and Terrence Cole in Fairbanks. The interview on Tuesday took place at Doyon, Ltd.'s offices. Elizabeth Taylor, Counsel for Doyon was present. The interview on February 21st took place at Mr. Lowell's home in Fairbanks. Present at that interview were the three persons named above and Mrs. Lowell. The interview on Tuesday was tape recorded. Terry Cole is working on transcription of that tape. The interview on February 21st was not taped, this interview was largely discussion and commentary on a number of historic photographs which Mr. Lowell showed to us.

Following is a summary of notes taken during the interview on February 20th. Ted Lowell was an employee for John Hajdukovich. Hajdukovich operated three trading posts during the early part of the twentieth century. These trading posts were located at the villages of Tetlin, Tanacross and Nabesna. Ted Lowell worked for Hajdukovich intermittently between 1929 and 1935. During the summers of 1930 and 31 he worked for Hajdukovich and spent his winters in Fairbanks. During the winter season of 1932 and 1933 he operated the trading posts on the upper Tanana River.

Lowell indicated that there were two so called Nabesna villages. The "upper" Nabesna village was further up the Nabesna River from the "lower" Nabesna village. Ted Lowell never visited the upper Nabesna village. During the 1913 Chisana stampede a Jack Yarich used poling boats to travel up and down the rivers in the upper Tanana River region. Yarich died at Northway, according to Lowell.

According to Lowell three traders operated trading posts at Nabesna village. Herman Kissler operated one there and another ten miles above Gardiner Creek on the left bank of the Chisana River. Milo Hajdukovich operated a trading post at Nabesna. Milo was a cousin to John Hajdukovich. In addition a person by the name of "Cap" O'Flanagan operated a trading post but was later bought out by Milo Hajdukovich. Later John Hajdukovich bought out the interests in the trading post owned and operated by Milo. At Scottie Creek Athapaskan Indians were supplied by Herman Kissler. According to Lowell Kissler operated a thirty foot long boat with a twelve horse power kicker motor. This boat was capable of carrying one and one half tons of supplies. The trading operated by Kissler for the benefit of the Scottie Creek Natives was a temporary post. Indians from the Canadian side of the Yukon Alaska border would come to Lowell's temporary post.

For all of these trading post operators the community of Big Delta was the source of supplies. Steamboats brought supplies from Fairbanks to Big Delta. After the construction of the Richardson Highway and a river crossing at Big Delta trucks took over this transportation link. Small river boats were utilized to take the supplies the remaining distance from Big Delta to the upper Tanana region where the trading posts were operated.

Typical items included in the trading post were finished clothing, raw materials such as bulk calico and cotton, food supplies especially staples such as flour, sugar, tea, etc., no perishable goods because of the problems in storage, tents, traps, rifles, ammunition, and related supplies. When questioned Lowell indicated that the Indians of the region seldom did any reloading of spent cartridge cases. He indicated that one reason for this was the low prices of ready to use ammunition. A box of 22 caliber shells cost only 75¢. A box of 30.30 shells cost only \$2.00.

When questioned about the types of furs that were trapped and traded in that part of Alaska Mr. Lowell indicated that lynx, otter, fox, wolf and mink were the primary furs. At the time Lowell was in the fur trading business beaver was closed in that part of Alaska. Perhaps the most important animal that was trapped and hunted by residents of the region was muskrat. Muskrats or rats as they are know colloquially were procured by the thousands by Indian hunters and trappers. At one time John Hajdukovich had a small cabin trading post at Gardener Creek located not far from Kissler's post. Thirty thousand rats taken during a season would be considered a good season. Indian trappers using 25 to 30 foot boats would travel through the lake and slough covered country trapping and shooting muskrats at the push ups in the spring time. Rats could be sold to the trading post operators almost as fast as they could be dried. Lowell recounted that Steve Northway at one time took 110 rats over night. Prices were variable for muskrat skins. In 1931 the traders purchased them at a rate of three for one dollar from the Indians. At other times prices went as high as two dollars per skin. In recent years prices have ranged from four to six dollars per skin. We questioned Lowell on the types of boats used in connection with muskrat hunting and the locations utilized by Indian residents of Northway and Nabesna villages. He indicated that the larger lakes further away from the villages were seldom used during the time that he was resident in the area. This was apparently because muskrats and moose were plentiful near the village and there was no need or incentive on the part of the people to have to travel any great distance away from the village.

Muskrat trapping took place during the open water period in late winter and early spring. Most muskrat are trapped at "push ups." A 0 or #1 trap was utilized. Because melting ice leaves the shores of fresh water lakes first open water in the spring allows the passage of small boats through the lakes between the remaining ice and the shore. During this time muskrats can be shot from boats. A small caliber rifle is used. Towards the end of the month of May or the first week in June muskrat season finishes. By this time in the annual cycle of subsistence and trapping activities, summer fishing and now in later years wage labor, takes over as the more important part of the economy.

We questioned Lowell concerning the alleged existence of the steamboat Tetlin on the Nabesna River. He indicated that he believed the steamboat was still located approximately eight miles up the Nabesna River from the village of Northway. This is the steamboat that apparently went up the Nabesna River taking stampeders to the Chishana River gold strike in 1913. Apparently the captain of the boat mistook the Nabesna River for the Chisana and was attempting to get back down the Nabesna when the boat ran hopelessly aground. Approximately 10 miles beyond Gardiner Creek on the Chisana River a number of prospectors got frozen in during that stampede. The temporary city which developed at that point was called Gasoline City. A man by the name of Sam Schucklin was prominent in the trading and business enterprises at Gasoline City. Ted Lowell said that he knew Sam.

Information obtained from Jack Yarich by Ted Lowell about steamboats and other boats used during the Chisana stampede was elicited. The steamboat White Seal travelled a stretch of water up the Chisana River and back down. The White Seal was later wrecked at the mouth of Billie Creek on the Tanana River. The steamboat Samson was used during the Chisana stampede and also travelled some distance up the Chisana River. This boat was named after Samson Hardware in Fairbanks. The Samson was later wrecked at the mouth of the Little Gerstle River.

According to Lowell Jack Yarich died in 1946. He had been a construction worker and lived what might be described in terms that Melody Grauman has used as leading a "typical frontier subsistence lifestyle." His home cabin or base was located approximately six miles below the mouth of the Nabesna River on the right bank of the Tanana River. In addition Yarich maintained a cabin at Northway. Further he had a trapping cabin located some ten miles up the Chisana River. Yarich prospected different creeks at various times including Gardiner Creek, the Chisana River, and the Nabesna River.

At John Hajdukovich's trading post at the mouth of Gardiner Creek Ted Lowell twice took the large motor boat with the grey motor belonging to Hajdukovich loaded with supplies up to this cabin. This boat had a six ton capacity for various supplies and items to be sold at the trading post. The trading post itself was log construction some sixteen or eighteen feet by twenty feet. In addition a log cache for storing supplies was kept at the trading post. Getting to this post was most difficult in the fall of the year when water is low. The best water for travelling to the trading post was in June and July. Hajdukovich owned and operated a number of boats in connection with his trading posts on the upper Tanana River and the Nabesna and Chisana Rivers. (See research notes from VA-F Archives). Some five hundred to six hundred gallons of gasoline were necessary to support these boats for the summer season of operation. Lowell indicated that ferrying supplies of gasoline between and to the trading posts was a necessary step in the logistics of operating the boats and the trading posts. One always tried to utilize as best possible travelling time and cargo space to balance the cargo that needed to be taken and the movement of gasoline to various points. Compared with the costs of air freight which began in the 1930's boating was much less expensive. Wein Airlines charged 40¢ per pound in some of the early air freighting operations.

The boats were utilized during the open season of water on the interior waterways. A winch and some skids for putting the boats up on dry land out of the water for the winter were located at Northway. A major occupation during the late summer and early fall was cutting a winter supply of wood for the trading cabins. After the construction of the Richardson Highway trucking of supplies between Fairbanks and Big Delta and then up the river was an important part of the operation. The yearly salary of \$1,800 plus board and clothes was considered a good job during the 1930's.

Hajdukovich had a reputation as being a generous man to the point of over extending credit to people who utilized the trading posts. In one year according to Lowell some thirty thousand dollars had been distributed and was, in the terms of the fur trade, "on the books." The 1936 trapping season was a bad one for Hajdukovich and 1937 almost completely wiping his trading post out. Hajdukovich attempted some prospecting on the Goodpastor River. In 1936 and 1937 Ted Lowell was in with him as a partner. Hajdukovich also operated as a big game guide on Jarvis Creek. He maintained line cabins throughout his big game guiding area. Wealthy sport hunters paid \$2,500 a piece for a guided hunt that lasted 30 days. Four sport hunters at a time were taken in on these hunts.

Lowell himself operated as a trader for a short period of time. In 1935 he bought the trading post located at Healy Lake in an estate sale. John Knight, who was an old man at the time helped him with the trading post at Healy Lake. Lowell kept the Healy Lake post until 1942. At that point the younger resident Indians in the area largely moved away from Healy Lake after the construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942. Older ones died out and Lowell was not certain if there was anyone in permanent residence even any longer at Healy Lake.

Lowell was questioned on the uses of rivers for floating saw logs. He indicated that a saw mill was transported from Fairbanks to the Goodpastor River area by himself. From there it was hauled up the Tanana River to Tetlin village. The mill was first used to saw three sided logs for the Tetlin school. After that the saw mill was either sold or given to the Natives. Lowell indicated that logs were floated down Tetlin Creek to the saw mill site. Lowell added that he seemed to recall that one of the big game hunters had purchased the saw mill for the use of the Tetlin Natives in a spirit of generosity after seeing their poor condition. It appears then that the first saw mill in the area was at Tetlin and that later it was boated from the Tetlin Creek location up the river to the village of Tetlin. A wheeled tractor was used to snag logs in the cutting area and pull them to the rivers. From there the logs were floated down river to the mill site.

Lowell was questioned about the use of specific rivers in the country around the upper Tanana. He indicated that on Moose Creek just prior to break-up each season he would dog sled supplies into an area that would later be used as rat trapping country. A cabin some six to seven miles from Northway was erected there for the purpose of trading during ridding season. Lowell used a thirty foot boat, with an outboard engine for transporting equipment and supplies to trade to this cabin. Although the boat had capacity for one and a half tons maximum he generally would carry about a ton of supplies in each trip. Herman Kissler operated a saw mill at the mouth of Moose Creek during

the time of the construction of the Alaska Highway. Kissler obtained his logs from up the Chisana River and transported them by boat to the saw mill. After the highway was constructed logs were transported to the saw mill by truck over the highway. Lowell recalled that the tractor mentioned above was at the village of Big Delta now. He remembered seeing it there during the summer of 1978. At one point Lowell recalled that there were thirteen saw mills in operation in connection with the construction of the Alaska Highway during the winter of 1941, 1942.

Lowell was questioned about various types of boats used for travel in the upper Tanana River region. He recalled that Jack Yarich was an excellent boat man in a poling boat. He recalled that Yarich could pole up the Tanana River and then up the Nabesna River to get to the trading posts. Jack had a 28 foot poling boat which he had constructed himself. He used lumber which had been hand whipsawed. This poling boat could carry over one ton of supplies. Its dimensions were 32 inches wide at the bottom, with flared out sides. Even with a full load of over one ton of supplies this poling boat drew only three or four inches of water. With poling boats such as this one people in the region could travel thirty to thirty five miles up the Nabesna or Chisana River without encountering great difficulty. Beyond that point the soft sandy bottoms of the rivers did not give enough purchase to the pole in order to be able to easily move up the rivers.

We questioned Lowell concerning the steamboat Nabesna. He indicated that a captain O'Flanagan owned and operated the Nabesna. Milo Hajdukovich had bought out O'Flanagan's trading operation on the Tanana River. Lowell believed that the Nabesna had originally been called the Eagle. The capacity of the Nabesna was between two hundred and two hundred twenty five tons. Its usual route was between Tetlin and Tanacross and the middle part of the Tanana River. Lowell recalled that O'Flanagan originally came from Oklahoma to Alaska. About 1932 or 1933 the Nabesna was abandoned at Big Delta in a slough opposite the town. This information corroborates information given to us by Bob Mitchell at the Alaska Division of Parks who is researching the history of the Nabesna for a possible National Register of Historic Places nomination.

We inquired about the topic of freight rates. Lowell indicated that rates typically were greater for upstream movement of goods than downstream. Furthermore the construction of roads reduced freight charges because truck transportation was less expensive than river transportation. From Big Delta to Northway, a trip up the Tanana River, Hajdukovich charged 10¢ per pound on the goods to his stores. By contrast after the construction of the Richardson Highway from Valdez to Big Delta freight carried by truck was only charged 2½¢ per pound.

With regard again to the Healy Lake trading post operated by Lowell he recalled that he was able to bring all three boats belonging to John Hajdukovich but used by Lowell in connection with his trading post into the Healy Lake area from the Tanana River. Chief Johnny Healy was hired during the summers by John Hajdukovich. Chief Healy was remembered to be a very good boat man by Lowell. As much as six tons of supplies were brought in on one boat to Healy Lake. The trading post operated by Lowell was actually located on the Tanana River

approximately one mile below the confluence of the Healy River with the Tanana.

One final note on information concerning Scottie Creek and the trading post operations there. Lowell recalled that the Canadian Indians who came across the border to trade at the Scottie Creek post especially liked American guns and trading goods. They believed these were superior in quality to the items that they could obtain from the Canadian trading post located on the Snag River in the Yukon Territory. Lowell recalled that an independent trader operated that post but could not remember his name.

The bulk of the information dictated in this memo to the files comes from the interview conducted on February 20th. As noted above the February 21st interview was concerned mostly with descriptions and commentary on the numerous black and white photographs which Lowell has in possession. He kindly lent us twenty three of those photographs. They are currently being duplicated with a copy negative to be retained by the Alaska Division of Forest, Land and Water Management in the research files for the Nabesna River.

CHISANA RIVER

Mining, 1915 (108-91502-W), 1913-1940 (2491), 1915-1916 (2267), 1917-1918 (2267), 1919-1920 (2267), 1921-1922 (2267), 1923-1924 (2267), 1925-1926 (2267), 1927-1928 (2267), 1929-1930 (2267), 1931-1932 (2267), 1933-1934 (2267), 1935-1936 (2267), 1937-1938 (2267), 1939-1940 (2267); and geological properties (2267) have been documented.

Eabin, USGS, 1915, states that the river is said to be navigable by canoes or poling boats far up its course (2267).

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
 NAVIGABILITY BIBLIOGRAPHY IN REFERENCE NUMBER SEQUENCE

DATE 07/03/79
 BRSL00 FINAL

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Waterbody Use and Observation Questionnaire

Return mailing:

**Attn: ANILCA PROGRAM
Access/Navigable Waters Section
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, AK 99518**

Date: February 09, 2005_____

Full Name of Interviewee: Corey Schwanke_____

Signature of Interviewee: Telephone interview _____

Current Address: Alaska Department of Fish and Game,
Division of Sport Fish
P. O. Box 47
Glennallen, Alaska, 99588-0047_____

Phone Number: 822-3461_____

Waterbody Name: Chisana River_____

U.S.G.S quadrangle map name known: Nabesna, Tanacross

**PLEASE ATTACH ADDITIONAL PAPER OR INFORMATION TO BEST
DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCES**

- A. Please describe the waterbody. Please be as specific as possible and include widths, depths, gradients, obstructions (artificial and natural), and seasonal water flows, i.e., lower dry periods, flood periods, and freeze up periods.
- B. Have you ever used the waterbody? Yes.
- 1) How long have you been using the waterbody, and how often? Include months and years. I was on the river in 1998 and 2000 during the months of August and September.
 - 2) What sections of the waterbody are you most familiar with? Attach a map if necessary. From the mouth of the river near the Tanana river, upstream as far as the King City site (1998), and to about 3-4 miles downstream of Notch Creek (2000).

- 3) What types of activities have you conducted on the waterbody? Example fishing, hunting, boating, transportation, and guiding. The river serves as our transportation corridor to get to sheep hunting areas in the mountains near the river.

C. How do you access the waterbody?

- 1) Where do you actually enter the waterbody? We put in at the bridge over the Chisana river, and occasionally we put in closer to the Nabesna river mouth on the Tanana river.
- 2) Where do you travel to? We go upstream to get to sheep hunting areas along the river.
- 3) Where do you take out at? List names of roads, trails, etc. As mentioned, near King City site and just downstream of Notch Creek. .
- 4) Are there more access points that you are familiar with but have not used? I have been told there is another spot where you can put in a small boat near the mouth of the Nabesna on the Tanana.
- 4) If there are obstructions, is it possible to portage?

D. What type of craft do you use when you are on the waterbody?.

- 1) What is the size of the craft used? 14 ft. flat bottom river boat
- 2) What type of propulsion is used on the craft? 40 hp jet outboard
- 3) What is the weight of the craft?
Less than 100 lbs 100-400 lbs 400-800 XX 800-1000+ lbs.
- 4) What is the estimated weight of the gear and people transported? 2 persons w/hunting gear for 1 week and 50 gals. of gas
Less than 100 lbs. 100-400 lbs 400-800 800-1000+ lbs XX.....
- 5) What is the largest size craft you have seen on this waterbody? Based on your experience, what is the largest craft this waterbody could support? I have seen an 18 ft. flat bottom boat with a 120 hp jet outboard motor. I think that under good water conditions, a boat as large as a 20 ft. I/O jet could use the river.

E. Have you observed other people on the waterbody? In what types of crafts? What activities? Yes. I have seen inflatable rafts and other boats similar to mine. These people appeared to be hunters looking for hunting locations.

- 1) Do you know of anyone who is paid to take people out in a boat on the waterbody as a guide? No.
- 2) Do you know of anyone that has used this waterbody but not actually seen them on the waterbody? Yes.

F. Please list any other contacts that would provide first hand accounts of use on this waterbody. Mark Keech, David Kelleyhouse.

Waterbody Use and Observation Questionnaire

Return mailing:

**Attn: ANILCA PROGRAM
Access/Navigable Waters Section
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, AK 99518**

Date: February 09, 2005 _____

Full Name of Interviewee: Corey Schwanke _____

Signature of Interviewee: Telephone interview _____

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Waterbody Name: Chisana River
U.S.G.S quadrangle map name known: Nabesna, Tanacross

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