

Welcome to



Big Delta

State Historical Park



Rika's Roadhouse

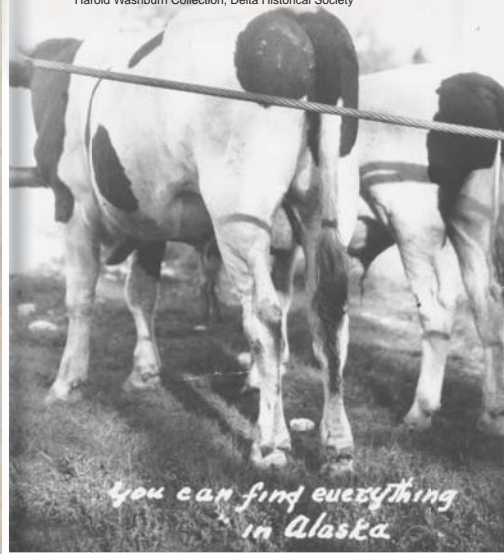
Alaska State Parks

For More Information

Milepost 275 Richardson Highway
P.O. Box 318
Delta Junction, AK 99737
907-451-2695
www.alaskastateparks.org



Rika Wallen and Marnie Washburn outside the barn, sometime in the early 1920s
Harold Washburn Collection, Delta Historical Society



Oxen at Big Delta
Harold Washburn Collection, Delta Historical Society

Big Delta State Historical Park is in the National Register of Historic Places. The Delta Historical Society maintains historical displays throughout the park.

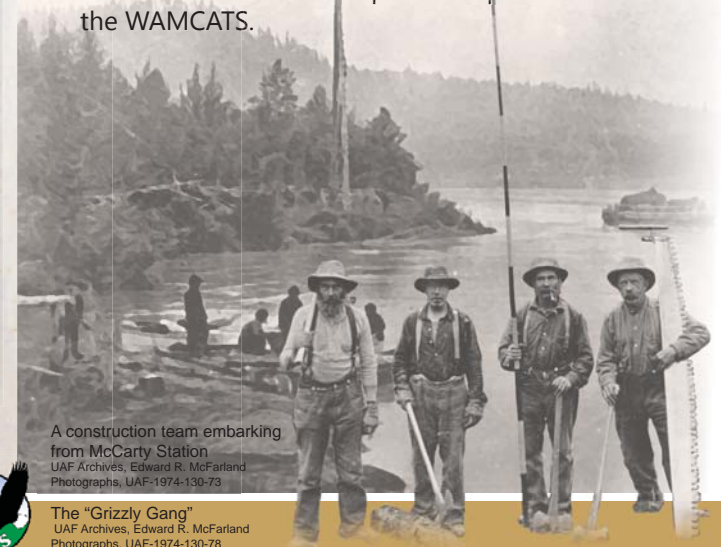


Communication

Imagine sending an email or text message and waiting one year for it to reach its intended audience and receive a response—in 1900 that is how long it took the U.S. Army in interior Alaska to communicate with their headquarters in Washington, D.C. To speed up communications, the U.S. Army built the Washington to Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) in 1903. The telegraph station at Big Delta was named McCarty Station after the owner of the trading post.

Soldiers were stationed every 20 to 40 miles along the line and endured lonely and harsh conditions. Their assignment was, perhaps, more tolerable at McCarty Station because of its location on the Tanana River—supplies arrived here first and were then distributed to other stations.

The U.S. Army allowed civilians to use the telegraph, which provided vital communication for settlers, miners, and travelers. Big Delta remained an important communication station when radio and then telephones replaced the WAMCATS.



A construction team embarking from McCarty Station
UAF Archives, Edward R. McFarland
Photographs, UAF-1974-130-73

The "Grizzly Gang"
UAF Archives, Edward R. McFarland
Photographs, UAF-1974-130-78

Roadhouse & Homestead

In 1904, entrepreneur Ben Bennett built a trading post and roadhouse near this Native winter camp to provide travelers, miners, and trappers with supplies and shelter. Bennett soon sold his holding to Daniel McCarty and it became known as the McCarty Trading Post. Fourteen non-Native people lived around the trading post by 1906.



McCarty Trading Post
Ted Lowell Collection, Delta Historical Society

John Hajdukovich

John Hajdukovich, from Yugoslavia, arrived at Big Delta in 1906 to seek his fortune in the nearby gold-rich hills. Hajdukovich acquired the trading post and roadhouse in 1909 and had a new roadhouse built. By 1913, the roadhouse was the center of activity for miners, traders, freighters, military personnel, hunters, and trappers. Hajdukovich lived and worked in this area for almost sixty years. He died in 1965 at age 86.

Rika Wallen

In 1917, John Hajdukovich hired Swedish-born Rika Wallen to run his business. She bought the roadhouse in 1923 for "\$10.00 and other considerations." Rika's Roadhouse was open year-round, catering to travelers in summer and locals in winter. Rika raised livestock and grew vegetables and fruits, which allowed her to serve fresh produce, eggs, milk, and meat. Rika ran the roadhouse until the mid-1940s; she died in 1969 and is buried on the grounds.



Rika Wallen
Photo Courtesy of Ted Lowell, Delta
Historical Society



View of roadhouse from river bank
Harold Washburn Collection, Delta Historical Society

A roadhouse and homestead, a river and road, a telegraph and radio—when interwoven, these threads create a rich and colorful tapestry at Big Delta State Historical Park. Big Delta has been significant in the development of interior Alaska for over 100 years.

Prior to European exploration and settlement, Athabascans traveled here during fall to benefit from the Tanana River's chum salmon runs. They overwintered and left for their summer camps in spring. When U.S. Army explorers passed through here in the late 1800s, it was during summer—they reported seeing Native dwellings, but no occupants.



John Hajdukovich
John Hajdukovich Collection,
Delta Historical Society







Doc Cripe and his dogs, Big Delta
Harold Washburn Collection, Delta Historical Society








Legend

Features

Interpretation

-  Transportation 
-  Communication 
-  Roadhouses and Homesteading 

-  RV Camping Sites
-  Parking
-  Park Info
-  Toilet
-  Rika's Roadhouse Café and Gifts
-  Dump Station
-  Water

Walking Tour Guide

-  1—Valdez to Fairbanks Trail
-  2—Alaska Road Commission Garage
-  3—Alaska Road Commission Outbuilding
-  4—Ferry Scale
-  5—Ferryman's Cabin
-  6—Prospectors' Trail
-  1—Military Stable Site
-  2—Telegraph Building
-  3—Mess Hall Foundation
-  4—Military Residence
-  1—Rika's Barn
-  2—Homestead Outbuilding (Museum)
-  3—Rika's Garden
-  4—Windmill
-  5—Rika's Roadhouse
-  6—Livestock Pen
-  7—Spring House
-  8—McCart Trading Post Foundation
-  9—Cold Cache
-  10—Rika's Grave
- 11—Rika's Roadhouse Café and Gifts

Transportation

After gold was discovered near Fairbanks in 1903, prospectors traveled to the discovery using a series of Native trails later named the Valdez to Fairbanks Trail. The Alaska Road Commission (ARC) improved the route to a 10-foot-wide dog team and packhorse trail and then to a summer wagon road. The ARC also installed a ferry at Big Delta to allow travelers safe passage across the Tanana River.

Even with improvements, traveling through the region was challenging. During winter, travelers experienced cold temperatures, deep snow, blizzards, and avalanches; during summer, marshy terrain, raging rivers, forest fires, and relentless bugs. Many travelers turned around before reaching Fairbanks—some experienced hypothermia, frostbite, and even death.

ARC road improvements eventually allowed for automobiles. By 1926, the trip from Valdez to Fairbanks could be accomplished in two days. The road—Alaska's first highway—was named the Richardson Highway to honor the first head of the ARC, Wilds P. Richardson.

In the 1940s, realignment of the Richardson Highway to meet the new high-truss steel bridge bypassed Rika's Roadhouse rendering the ferry obsolete. With the completion of the Alcan Highway, the population of Big Delta moved to the junction of the Alcan and Richardson highways, signaling the end of an era.



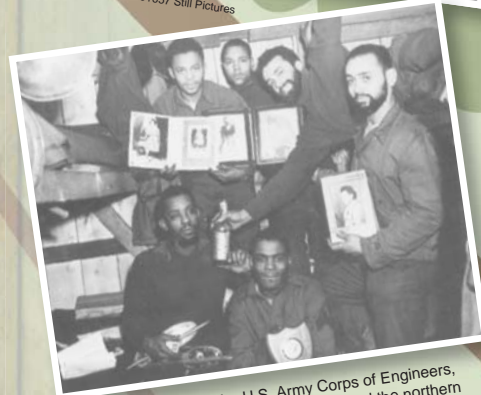
Ferry at Big Delta, circa 1910-1920
Museum of History & Industry, #SHS 17416



Model T with banner "Fairbanks, Chitina, Valdez! or Bust!"
Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Crary Henderson Collection, B62.1A.83



McCarty/Grundler Station
National Archives, 111-SC-91657 Still Pictures



The 97th Regiment of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, comprised of 400 black soldiers, constructed the northern segment of the Alcan Highway. They camped at Big Delta December 1942 through April 1943 while repairing the wooden bridge.
Courtesy of William Griggs

Timeline

- 1800s—Native Athabaskan winter camp
- 1896—Klondike gold discovery
- 1902—Army Lieutenant William "Billy" Mitchell explores for telegraph line
- 1903—Fairbanks gold discovery
- 1903—WAMCATS begins operating
- 1903—Prospectors travel on local trails from Valdez to Fairbanks
- 1904—Ben Bennett builds trading post and roadhouse
- 1905—Daniel McCarty purchases trading post
- 1905—Alaska Road Commission establishes Valdez to Fairbanks Trail and installs ferry
- 1906—John Hajdukovich arrives at Big Delta
- 1907—WAMCATS McCarty Station opens
- 1909—Hajdukovich acquires trading post
- 1913—Gold discovery at Chisana
- 1913—First automobile over trail
- 1913—Hajdukovich has new roadhouse built
- 1914—ARC outbuilding constructed
- 1917—Rika Wallen arrives at Big Delta
- 1925—WAMCATS McCarty Station closes
- 1926—Radio replaces telegraph
- 1926—Wallen adds new wing on roadhouse
- 1927—Trail designated and becomes Richardson Highway
- 1935—McCarty Station turned over to ARC
- 1937—ARC installs scales at ferry crossing
- 1938—Army builds airfield at Big Delta
- 1942—Army constructs Alcan Highway
- 1943—High-truss steel bridge built across Tanana River, Richardson Highway realigned—ferry is rendered obsolete
- 1965—John Hajdukovich dies
- 1969—Rika Wallen dies
- 1976—Rika's Roadhouse listed in National Register of Historic Places
- 1991—Big Delta Historic District listed in National Register of Historic Places