

# PRELIMINARY

## III. THE DALTON TRAIL

(Pyramid Harbor to the Canadian Border)

## A. BACKGROUND

For hundreds of years the Chilkat Indians along the Chilkat River in Southeast Alaska used a route through the rugged Coastal Mountains to trade with the so-called Stick Indians in the interior. The Chilkat people guarded this route jealously to prevent others from interfering in their colonial-like trade monopoly with the Sticks.

In the late 1800's increased numbers of prospectors, explorers, missionaries and others moved up the coast from Seattle, British Columbia and other areas and the secret trail of the Chilkats was soon "discovered". In 1880 Edmund Bean is reported to have learned of the route up the Chilkat and Klehini Rivers into the interior. The year before John Muir and a missionary named S. Hall Young had sailed into Chilkat Inlet and talked with Chilkat Indian leaders from the village of Klukwan. In 1881 Young returned with Sheldon Jackson and together they established Chilkat Mission, soon renamed Haines Mission, near the mouth of the Chilkat River.

Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka of the U.S. Army, made the first official exploration of the route crossing into the interior in 1883. Frank Leslie of Leslie's Magazine organized a party in 1890 which explored the historic Chilkat Trail over the divide into the interior. One of the young scouts hired for this expedition was John "Jack" Dalton. The following year Dalton and E.J. Glave explored the route to the Indian village on the Tatshenshini River, a tributary of the Alsek. For the first time pack horses were taken into the interior on this trip.

Gold was discovered in the Klondike in the fall of 1896. Word reached "outside" in the late spring of 1897 and the gold rush was on. Jack Dalton by this time was a seasoned businessman in the Upper Lynn Canal area and immediately set in motion plans to develop a toll trail to the gold fields. Although the routes over Chilkoot Pass and White pass were shorter, these were also much steeper and more tortuous than the old Chilkat Trail. In July of 1897, Dalton hired a professional surveyor to map and survey his new personal trail to the Klondike following the historic Chilkat route.

By the early summer of 1898, a good pack horse trail had been constructed by Pyramid Harbor near the mouth of the Chilkat River to the summit of the Coastal Mountains in Canada. From there the trail continued through more or less open country to Rink Rapid on the Yukon.

During that same summer gold was discovered near the Dalton Trail on Porcupine Creek, 36 miles from Haines Mission. A small rush occurred over the next year. Gold mining in the Porcupine area continued for many years and played an important role in the local economy and transportation in the early 1900's.

The Alaskan and Yukon gold rush created a need for law enforcement. Many posts were established in the early 1900's, the largest one of which was Fort William H. Seward. This fort was established in 1903-04, and was located just outside of Haines Mission.

## B. LOCATION AND REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

### GENERAL ALIGNMENT

The overall general alignment of the Dalton Trail in the U.S. and British Columbia is shown on the attached map. It connected the northern portion of Southeastern Alaska with the Yukon.

From its origin at Pyramid Harbor it crossed about five miles of mud beach exposed at low tide, then proceeded along the west side of the Chilkat River, moved away from the river opposite Klukwan, then up the south side of the Klehini River to the vicinity of Boulder Creek. Here the trail crossed the Klehini and continued along the north side to the Canadian border.

From the border the trail zig-zagged to the first summit, a little over 3,300 feet, and then down the Tatshenshini River to Dalton Post. From there, the trail went around Dezadeash Lake to Champagne, then to Hutshi. From Hutshi the main trail went down the Nordenskiold River to Carmacks and Rink Rapid on the Yukon. An extension of this route continued north to Ft. Selkirk. A branch trail went west out of Hutshi to Aishihik Lake and then north across the upper Nisling River drainage to Fort Selkirk at the Pelly River and Yukon confluence.

Because the Klehini River is a braided, glacial river, channel changes were frequent and water depths varied greatly over the course of a season. Consequently, river crossing points varied, sometimes ranging from just above Klukwan to near the Canadian border.

### LENGTH

The length of the Dalton Trail from Pyramid Harbor to Rink Rapid on the Yukon was about 305 miles. The continuation of the trail to Ft. Selkirk was about 350 miles. Dawson is located approximately 200 river miles downstream of Fort Selkirk.

The segment in the United States was about 55 miles long. It was roughly 20 miles from the border to the first summit. From Pyramid Harbor to Dalton Post in the Yukon was 126 miles. The major constructed portion of the trail extended approximately 65 miles to timberline before the first summit.



## REGIONAL CLIMATE, TOPOGRAPHY, VEGETATION, WILDLIFE

The Dalton Trail area in the United States lies in a maritime climatic zone characterized by cool summers, mild winters, and heavy precipitation. Summer highs rarely exceed 80°F and winter lows rarely drop below 10°F. Precipitation averages around 60 inches a year with up to 100 inches of snow falling. A more continental climate is encountered as one proceeds up river to the Canadian border. Less precipitation, warmer summer temperatures and colder winter temperatures occur further from the sea coast.

The trail followed the glacial valleys of the Klehini and Chilkat Rivers in the United States. Over virtually their entire breadth, the flat valley floors show evidence of past stream channels. The Chilkat valley averages 2 miles across, while the Klehini valley is only about one half mile wide. The elevation of the Klehini at the border is 812 feet.

Because of shifting stream channels, the historic route was often pressed between the valley floor and the steep slopes of the adjacent hills and mountains. Nearby peaks rise to over 5,000 feet in elevation. The many swift streams carrying the runoff of melting glaciers from these peaks have cut deep ravines and canyons which intersect the Chilkat and Klehini valleys.

A dense western hemlock-Sitka spruce forest covers the river valleys up to an elevation of around 2,500 feet. Black cottonwood and red cedar are also common in the area. In most places an almost impenetrable undergrowth of alder, devil's club, willows, berries, and ferns exists.

Large game animals in the area include black bear, brown/grizzly bear, moose, mountain goats, wolves and wolverine. Other wildlife includes many species of furbearers, waterfowl, and other birds. Of unique significance is the concentration of bald eagles which occur along the lower Chilkat in October and November, reported to be the greatest in the world. In 1970, over 3,500 were counted in a 2-mile stretch - one cottonwood tree was reported to have 55 perching birds. The streams in the area have excellent runs of several varieties of salmon.

On the Canadian side, shortly beyond the border, a different type of environment exists. Sweeping alpine tundra replaces the forest about 15 miles upstream, beyond the border. For over 50 miles this high open country continues until dropping down into the rolling hills and plateaus of the Yukon interior.

A severe continental climate replaces the maritime coastal climate of the Chilkat valley and a sparser, more open spruce-birch forest cover prevails.

#### LAND USES AND ACCESS

About 1,500 people live in the Chilkat valley with most living in and around the city of Haines. Others live along the Haines Highway or Haines Cutoff which runs from the ferry terminal, 3 miles east of Haines, to the Canadian border and north to the Alcan Highway in the Yukon Territory.

Although most of the land is in a more or less natural state, timber is the leading industry of the area and many areas in the Chilkat valley show evidence of past and present timber harvesting. Fishing and tourism are also important sectors of the local economy.

In addition to the highway which parallels the Chilkat and Klehini Rivers along their east and north banks respectively, access by air and water is also available. Haines is served daily by commercial air service from Juneau and by car and passenger ferry service from Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Skagway, Alaska, and Seattle, Washington. Access by motorboat and canoe to various sections of the trail route, is also possible along the Chilkat and Klehini Rivers.

Over 100 Indians continue to live in the historic village of Klukwan. Although tied into a dollar economy by Haines and the highway, some subsistence hunting, fishing, and trapping activities take place in the area.

#### GENERAL LAND OWNERSHIP

Most of the land in the Chilkat and Klehini valleys is owned by the State of Alaska. The village of Klukwan recently received patent to lands surrounding the village under the terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Several parcels of private property exist along the Dalton Trail route, and mining claims may still be active in the Porcupine area.

### C. HISTORIC RESOURCES

#### PERIOD AND TYPE OF USE

Prior to construction of the Dalton Trail in the early summer of 1898, travel over the route was directly up the valley floor following the river banks, sand bars and old channel cut. This route could only be followed when the glaciers weren't melting and water levels were low. Thus, only in the fall right before freeze-up, and in the spring when the deep snows had melted in the lower elevations, was this route used.

The Dalton Trail received most of its use during the summers of 1898 and 1899. By 1900, the Yukon and White Pass Railroad had been completed between Skagway and Whitehorse eliminating most of the hardships of that route. What advantage and attraction the Dalton Trail had over the rugged Chilkoot and White Pass routes was quickly lost when passenger and freight rail service became available.

Although the Dalton Trail traversed an easier pass from the Lynn Canal to the interior gold fields, it never attracted the numbers of stampedeers that went over the nearby Chilkoot and White Pass Trails. While easier, the Dalton Trail was considerably longer than the other two - 300 miles to water transportation as opposed to 40 or 50 miles.

The largest traffic over the trail consisted of livestock. The Dalton Trail was well suited for horses, cattle, and sheep and played an important role in supplying booming Dawson with meat and pack animals. Over 2,000 head of cattle and 2,000 horses passed over the trail in the summer of 1898. Dalton charged \$2.00 a head of cattle and \$2.50 a horse for the use of his trail. Animals were taken as far as Rink Rapid and sometimes Fort Selkirk where they were transferred to scows and floated down the Yukon to Dawson.

The trail also played a part in the famous U.S. Reindeer Relief Expedition. The food crisis in Dawson in the winter of 1897-98, prompted Congress to appropriate \$200,000 for the purchase of a reindeer herd to ship north to the Yukon. Over 500 reindeer were shipped from Norway, brought across the U.S. to Seattle by rail, then shipped to Haines. With no feed for them at Haines most starved to death before reaching the lichens in the alpine areas. They were driven over the Dalton Trail and northward to Dawson and encountered so many obstacles and tortures that only 114 animals reached their destination nearly a

year later in January, 1899. Needless to say, the food crisis had long since past and it was the relief expedition which ended up having to be aided.

Jack Dalton also started the Dalton Pony Express Company during the summer of 1898. With 250 saddle horses, he attempted to establish passenger service between the port at Haines and river steamers operating between Dawson and Rink Rapid. For \$150 (Burton reports \$250), travelers could bridge the gap in water transportation and avoid the perilous Chilkoot and White Pass routes. However, the company soon went under when steamers began operating on the lakes in the upper Yukon, between Whitehorse and the Chilkoot and White Pass facilitating travel over these routes. Similarly, mail was carried by Dalton's Pony Express only once before being directed to the lake steamer route.

The gold strike on Porcupine Creek in the summer of 1898, brought over 1,000 people into the local area during the next year - many coming over the Dalton Trail. In the early 1900's, however, the establishment of Fort William Seward outside Haines shifted the attention from the Pyramid Harbor area to the east side of Chilkat Inlet. Soon a new trail, the Throp's Trail, was established which ran from Haines along the east side of the Chilkat River, opposite the Dalton Trail, to above Klukwan where it crossed the Klehini to Porcupine. By 1916, the Alaska Road Commission had constructed a wagon road along this route to Porcupine and automobiles could drive as far as Klukwan. In 1943, the Army constructed the Haines Cutoff to the Alcan Highway generally paralleling the old Dalton Trail from the border, through British Columbia and into the Yukon Territory. The road was opened to the public in 1947.

#### HISTORIC TRAIL REMNANTS

Virtually all of the historic Dalton trail in the U.S. is now either overgrown with brush and trees or destroyed by changing river courses or modern logging roads. Because of the abundance of precipitation, plant growth and decay is relatively rapid and historic trail evidence has disappeared.

At least one old cabin is present along the old trail alignment and several old structures exist at Porcupine. It is not known how old these structures are, but it is doubtful that any date back to the turn of the century. Remains of the old Canadian customs building are present at the border.

Old tools and implements have been found along the

nearby historic Chilkoot Trail and it is reasonable to expect that such historic items associated with the early use of the Dalton Trail might still exist along the route.

#### RELATED HISTORIC SITES

Two sites associated with this trail area are listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Fort William H. Seward and Pleasant Camp.

Fort Seward was entered on the Register April 11, 1972, and is located in the city of Haines. This fort was the largest in Alaska for many years having 85 buildings and 400 men stationed there. Many of the buildings are still standing and in private use today.

Pleasant Camp was entered July 5, 1973, and is located at the Canadian border. This site consists of the remains of the first Canadian customs building later used for the U.S. customs building and as a roadhouse.

In addition to these sites, the abandoned town of Porcupine is still in evidence although most of the remaining buildings date back to later mining done in the 1920's and 1930's. This townsite has been studied by the Alaska Division of Parks and was identified as having regional significance and a potential for historic interpretation.

Predating all these sites is the Chilkat Indian village of Klukwan. This site has been inhabited continuously for hundreds of years. In 1880, Aurel Krause reported the village to have 65 houses and 500-600 people. Today, slightly more than 100 persons reside in the village.

#### HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The Dalton Trail played a short but important role in the Klondike Gold Rush. Only a fraction of the reported 30,000 to 50,000 people who crossed Chilkoot and White Pass Trails traversed the Dalton. However, this trail was much better suited for animals, and a substantial number of those reaching Dawson in 1898 and 1899 came up this route. These animals were extremely important to the food supply of Dawson which depended almost entirely on outside sources.

The Dalton Trail was unique in the Alaska-Klondike

Gold Rush in that it was the only trail built largely by one man and successfully operated as a toll trail. Viewed as a monument to private enterprise, Jack Dalton's trail was indeed remarkable. While gate crashers, governments, and poor management made attempts at establishing toll roads and trails elsewhere short-lived, Dalton enforced his tolls, even at gunpoint, continuously for the economic life of his trail.

The Dalton Trail also played a role in the early rush to the gold strike at Porcupine. Jack Dalton himself eventually bought up many of the claims. This gold mining area was regionally significant and produced about \$150,000 a year between 1898 and 1906. A total production of around \$1.2 million was achieved up to 1916. This represents about one-half of the total placer gold production between 1880 and 1970 in Southeastern Alaska.

#### D. PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE TRAIL USES AND ENVIRONMENT

##### PRESENT TRAIL CONDITION

No maintained hiking-type trail presently exists in the U.S. along the historic route. Over approximately half the route in the upper valley a logging road(s) exists. This road is passable by four-wheel drive vehicles much of its distance in dry weather, although stream crossings may prevent passage during high water. A few miles of logging road immediately below Porcupine are only traversable on foot or motorcyle.

Dense underbrush prevents any travel along other sections of the historic route.

##### SCENIC, RECREATIONAL QUALITIES

Scenery along the Chilkat and Klehini River valleys is excellent. High glacier-covered peaks tower above the low-lying valley. A lush forest provides a variety of color contrasts to the rock and snow above. Many small streams have cut deep intersecting canyons and the large runoff provides spectacular water cascades.

The presence of a highway along the north side of the valley and the presence of logging roads and logged areas degrades most primitive and wilderness recreational characteristics of the trail. However, the ease of access at the same time gives the area high potential for family use, day use, and for a variety of recreational activities such as picnicking, short hiking, photography, off-road vehicle use, wildlife observation and others. The concentration of bald eagles in this region during certain months is a significant recreation attraction.

##### RECREATIONAL USES

Present recreational uses of the historic trail route are limited to those sections where logging roads have retained an open corridor through the dense forest and brush. Day hikes of up to 15 miles have been reported from the bridge crossing of the Klehini above Klukwan to the vicinity of Pleasant Camp. The necessity to ford glacial streams and rivers presents a considerable obstacle and safety hazard.



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& XC SKI

Recreational off-road vehicle use is also taking place on the logging road. Motorcycles and four-wheel drive vehicles cross to the south side of the Klehini, at the bridge or ford near Porcupine. The Tsirku River can also be forded and the logging road can be followed southeast from there for 5 or 6 miles.

Activities not necessarily oriented to the trail route also occur. Hunting and fishing are popular recreational pursuits throughout the trail area.

Much of the current recreational use is by local residents. Future use is expected to increase and to include larger numbers of tourists, as Alaska visitation increases statewide. The absence of a well maintained trail will continue to limit trail oriented activities.

The Alaska Division of Parks has recently published a master development plan for the authorized Battery Point Recreation Area south of Haines. This plan identifies the historical and recreational importance of the Dalton Trail, Porcupine, and Pleasant Camp among other resources in the area. It is recommended in the plan that a portion of the Dalton Trail be brushed out and marked between Pleasant Camp and Porcupine for hiking use, and that all river crossings be upgraded, consistent with the period when constructed. Protection and visitor facilities are also recommended in the plan for Pleasant Camp and Porcupine.

The historic route through Canada has not been studied or proposed for trail development by the federal government, British Columbia, or the Yukon Territory.

#### NON-RECREATIONAL USES

Some hunting, fishing and trapping for subsistence purposes, primarily by residents of Klukwan, may involve areas along the historic route.

Logging is a leading sector of the local economy and several areas along the trail are presently being logged. This activity is expected to continue in the future.

Some gold mining is still going on in the Porcupine area. This activity is sporadic and the potential for future mining development on any scale appears low.



## E. CONCLUSIONS - RECOMMENDATIONS

### QUALIFICATION FOR NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL DESIGNATION

The National Trails System Act (Public Law 90-543, October 2, 1968) authorized criteria to be used in the evaluation of potential additions to the system. The following guidelines apply to National Scenic Trails, the system under which this historic route is being considered.

Criterion: Because of their special characteristics, National Scenic Trails should be nationally significant and be capable of attracting visitors throughout the United States.

Findings: The Dalton Trail cannot be considered as significant as other Gold Rush Trails in the same area, the Chilkoot and the White Pass Trails. However, the Dalton Trail was an international trail and played an important role in the initial development of Dawson and the Klondike gold fields. It is unique in that it is the only Alaskan gold rush trail built and operated as a toll road largely by one man, Jack Dalton.

Looking at only the segment in the United States, it is doubtful whether it has the potential to draw visitors from throughout the United States. Even with an extension into Canada, the historical and recreational appeal could probably not successfully compete with the nearby Chilkoot Trail.

Criterion: National scenic trails are designed for hiking and other compatible uses. The National Trails System Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment on these trails.

Findings: Off-road vehicle uses, both recreational and for logging purposes, are currently taking place along the historic route (no trail as such exists). It would be possible to design a trail along the general route for hiking and other compatible purposes.

Criterion: National scenic trails of historical importance should adhere as accurately as possible to their principal historic routes.

Findings: Logging roads, the highway, and changing river channels have destroyed or overlain various segments of the trail. However, a fairly close alignment of the historic route is still possible in the U.S.

Criterion: As far as practical, national scenic trails should avoid highways, motor roads, mining areas, power transmission

lines, commercial and industrial developments, range fences, and other activities that could detract from scenic interest.

Findings: For much of its length in the U.S. the route parallels a highway. Although the Haines Cutoff and the historic route are on opposite sides of a two to one-half mile wide valley and are separated by a river, highway sounds and influences could adversely affect the trail area.

In addition, logging roads and logging areas cover substantial portions of the route and would adversely affect scenic and recreational qualities.

Criterion: National scenic trails should be provided with adequate public access through connecting local or regional trails. Access should be located at reasonable intervals to provide for trips of various lengths.

Findings: The presence of a paralleling road makes the potential for access trails of any meaningful length low. The presence of the road does offer potential for a variety of short hikes, although outings of several days would not be likely.

Criterion: National scenic trails should be primarily land based.

Findings: The Dalton Trail is primarily land based.

Criterion: National scenic trails should be extended trails, usually several hundred miles or more in length.

Findings: The portion of the Dalton Trail in the U.S. was approximately 55 miles long. This segment has low potential for extended trail use.

The total Dalton Trail was 305 miles to Rink Rapid with an additional 45 miles to Fort Selkirk. It is not known whether the potential for an extended trail over this entire distance, through Canada exists. However, the Haines Highway roughly parallels this route for approximately 140 miles and the Alcan for about 30 miles to near Rink Rapid.

Criterion: National scenic trails should be continuous for their entire length.

Findings: Except for stream crossings and the presence of logging roads, no major obstacles to a continuous trail exist in the U.S. However, in several places changing river channels and the presence of tidal flats would require relocation of the old route.

Because of dense forests and extremely steep terrain such construction would be very difficult and costly in places.

It is not known if a continuous trail through Canada is feasible.

#### POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER IN-DEPTH STUDY

The Dalton Trail from Pyramid Harbor to the Canadian border does not appear to meet the guidelines established for national scenic trails. The shortness of the trail (55 miles) is the principal reason for not qualifying although the presence of a paralleling road, logging roads, and logging areas, and the absence of national recreational significance, also contribute to this disqualification.

The Dalton Trail did extend several hundred miles into Canada. It is not known what the recreational trail potential of an extended Canadian segment might be. Neither the Canadian federal government nor the government of British Columbia or the Yukon have studied the Canadian route, or proposed any trail development.

The potential for further in-depth study of the U.S. route as a national scenic trail is low. Should all or portions of the Canadian route be studied by the respective Canadian governments, the Dalton Trail through the U.S. should be reexamined.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that no further study be made of the Dalton Trail at this time.
2. Because of growing tourism in this area, due to the ferry terminal and highway link with the Alcan Highway, the potential for high-use trail oriented recreation in this area is excellent. It is recommended that the Haines Borough and the State of Alaska examine various segments of the route for possible trail protection and development and where appropriate, inclusion in the national recreation trails system.

## F. INFORMATIONAL SOURCES

There are no known comprehensive sources available for the Dalton Trail. However, those shown in the bibliography provide some information on the trail or the trail area. Not all references shown were researched or utilized for this report. The bibliography includes all the possible informational sources which surfaced during the course of this initial study effort. There are undoubtedly more sources.

In addition to these documental sources there are many persons still living having first-hand knowledge of the route. Information from such persons is invaluable to any study effort.

Most of the references contained in this bibliography were compiled by the Territorial Archivist of the Yukon Government, Mr. W. Brian Speirs. Other references were obtained through the work of the Alaska State Division of Parks.

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