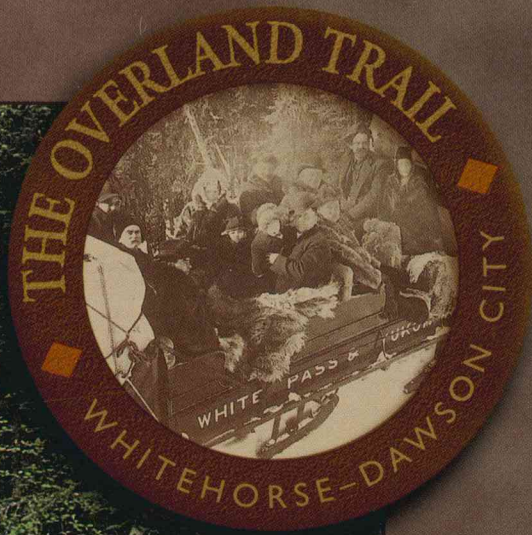


Greg Stutz



## Notice to travellers

*Prospective summer travellers are advised that the trail has deteriorated in many places with sections of swampy muskeg and creek crossings that make foot travel difficult. Some sections are badly overgrown or intersect with other trails. Hikers—especially inexperienced ones—risk getting lost.*

*Several large rivers make the journey impossible without water transport. It is not an easy hike, although some sections are suitable for day trips.*

*Artifacts and building remains along the trail are evidence of its history. Please do not remove artifacts or trample building sites. Leave them for others to discover, explore and appreciate.*







*Horse-drawn sleds loaded with freight and passengers gather at Post No. 6 of the Canadian Development Co. in 1900.*

## It all started with a little problem on the river...

During the Klondike Gold Rush and for years after, the quickest way to get from Whitehorse to Dawson City was by boat along the Yukon River. In those days life in the territory was governed by whether the river was open or frozen. Once winter set in and the river froze, only experienced mushers and dog teams braved the journey. Late fall and early winter travel was limited to snowshoes, horse and dog teams. Transportation was slow and costly. The cold reduced travel to a minimum.

During the winter of 1899-1900 the Canadian Development Company used dog teams to carry mail and light freight along the river between Whitehorse and Dawson. It gradually replaced the dogs with horses the following year. In 1901 the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway bought out the company in order to get the lucrative government mail contract for its sternwheelers.

Greg Skuce



*A cutbank along the Overland Trail as it appears today. Other sections of the trail are completely overgrown and unrecognizable.*

In 1902 the Yukon government contracted the White Pass & Yukon Route to build the first winter road between the two communities. Construction began that

summer and the road was completed in November. It was 330 miles long—shorter than the river route by about 70 miles—and was built at a cost of \$129,000.



*First Nations man greets travellers arriving at Carmacks in 1914. In the background, a fresh team of horses is brought to replace the team at right.*

Using only axes and cross-cut saws, the company's small crew of men cleared a 12-foot right-of-way along the entire distance. Aided by horses, they graded the surface with plows and wheel scrapers, built culverts where necessary, and reinforced embankments with rough timber. The road builders used traditional First Nations trails whenever possible, most

## **The White Pass & Yukon Route**

**The Equipment** of the railway is first-class in every respect. During the summer season observation cars are put in service for tourists, giving them an unobstructed view of the magnificent scenery along the railroad.

### **WINTER ROUTE SERVICE**

In connection with the regular daily train service, a first-class relay stage line will be operated between White Horse and Dawson during the winter season, carrying passengers, mail, express and freight, running on a schedule of 5 to 5½ days. Specially built sleds provided with plenty of warm fur robes and drawn by four horses will be used for this service.

Passengers on our stages will travel during the day time only, stopping at night at one of the well furnished Road Houses which have been established about every 25 miles. Everything possible will be done for the comfort and convenience of our passengers.

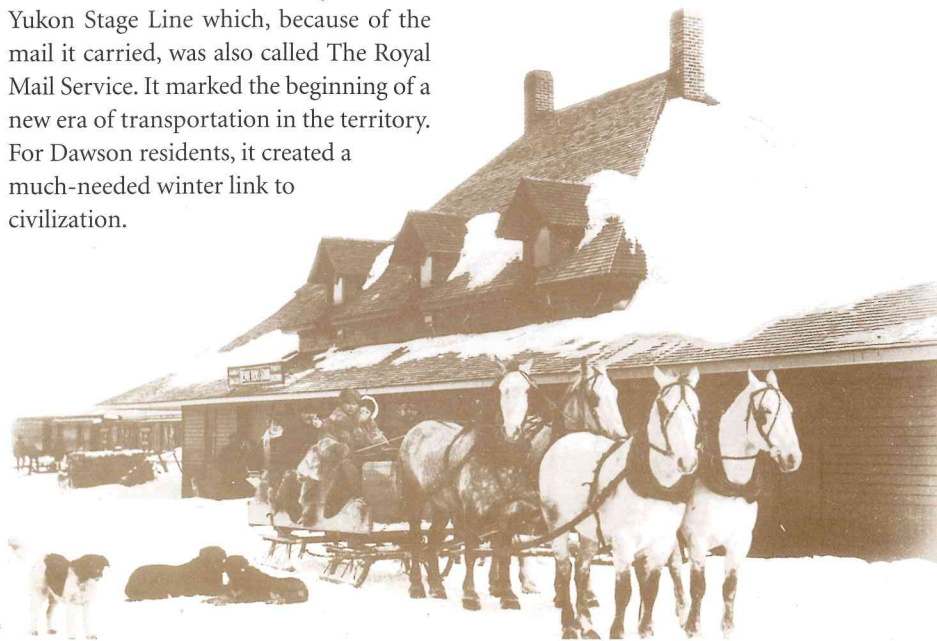
The Canadian Government is building an overland trail from White Horse to Dawson, which it is expected will be completed and ready for use this winter. This trail will do away with the necessity of waiting for the ice to form on the river, and it is also expected that it will permit of a reduction in the running time of the stages.

likely in the Takhini River valley and the Nordenskiöld valley between Braeburn and Carmacks.

This winter road between Whitehorse and Dawson became known as The Overland Trail. The White Pass then inaugurated the Yukon Stage Line which, because of the mail it carried, was also called The Royal Mail Service. It marked the beginning of a new era of transportation in the territory. For Dawson residents, it created a much-needed winter link to civilization.

For the first time they were not cut off from the rest of the world for almost eight months of the year.

*Horse-drawn sleigh prepares to leave White Pass depot in Whitehorse in the early 1900s.*



*Laura Berton, mother of Canadian author Pierre Berton, was still a young, unmarried school teacher in Dawson City during the 1920s. In her memoir *I Married the Klondike*, she describes a winter journey on the Overland Trail in a White Pass & Yukon Route sleigh:*

“Four o’clock, Miss Thompson. Stage leaves in an hour!”

“Four o’clock in Whitehorse...the mercury at forty below...a week-long trip in an open sleigh ahead of me...the little town dead and sleeping under its mantle of winter fog...a group of sleepy passengers huddled in furs at the White Pass station...the great sleigh with its four champing horses waiting.

“Off we went into the silent night and into a silent world of white. For five days we would sit in this open sleigh, our noses iced, our feet warmed by hot bricks and charcoal, while we crossed the Yukon Territory in a wavering diagonal line north. I have never embarked on a stranger journey...”

“It was not a comfortable trip. The seats had hardly any backs and we had not been out long before I became unpleasantly conscious of my neck. It just wouldn’t hold up my wobbling head. With no support from the seat I tried tying a scarf over my turban, binding it tightly around my head. It was no use. ...

“There were 14 of us travelling north. We sat in threes in two double rows of seats facing each other, the spare man up on the box beside the driver...

“...I sat in the rear seat, squeezed between a Swede on one side and a French-Canadian miner on the other. The Swede was a huge, gaunt wedge of a man with a great walrus moustache and a long nose and chin. The French-Canadian was round-faced, jolly and plump. At first I was only too glad of the fur-coated warmth of their proximity, for I was so cold I would cheerfully have cuddled a grizzly. But as the journey continued, I couldn’t help realizing that the warm and persistent pressure coming simultaneously from both sides was not altogether the result of confined space. For five days I parried their advances....”

Laura Berton, *ibid*

## One trail...five different sections

The Overland Trail was not a single, uninterrupted stretch of road. It was actually five sections of road divided by four major rivers – the Takhini, Yukon, Pelly and Stewart.

From Whitehorse the original trail headed west, crossed the Takhini River, followed

the Klusha and Little rivers to Braeburn, then along the Nordenskiöld River and into Carmacks. At Mackay’s, which was later renamed Yukon Crossing, the trail crossed the Yukon River and then followed the east bank to Pelly, where it crossed the Pelly River. On the north side of the Pelly

Yukon Archives, Forrest, Emile Coll., 80/60 #40



*Frost-covered horses and passengers are shown with a wheeled stage along the trail in early winter.*

it ran northwest to Stewart Crossing (not to be confused with the current site of Stewart Crossing) and over the Stewart River to Wounded Moose. From there the trail branched off at the Indian River and finally to Dawson via Eldorado and Bonanza Creeks.

Over the years the route was changed numerous times to provide access to new mining camps that sprang up in the territory. When Mayo became a busy mining camp in 1912, the road branched off at Minto. A new branch was built to Mayo, while the main route to Dawson

angled northeast to the Stewart River, then went up the Slough Creek Valley and down Flat Creek into the Klondike Valley.

The government also hoped that the road would open up new areas of the territory to farming. A few modest attempts were made to help supply hay and oats for the horse-drawn stages, but this goal was never fully realized. There was much more money to be made from mining.

Between 1902 and 1914, after the close of river navigation, the White Pass Stage Line ran its sleighs and stages three times a week

between Whitehorse and Dawson. In March, when business people were eager to get to Dawson before steamboat traffic began, daily service was often provided.

The White Pass began its winter service with the popular Concord stage coaches imported from Concord, New Hampshire, but they were soon abandoned.

The Concords were designed for more moderate use on well-graded roads in

*Horse stables are visible at left, and the large two-storey roadhouse at right. Ice-covered Yukon River can be seen in the distance.*



Yukon Archives, Book Coll. 90/19 #29

# Yukon innovations in stage and sleigh design

milder southern climates. They weren't strong enough for hauling heavy loads on long journeys down rugged wilderness trails in temperatures that dropped to 40 degrees below zero.

The company began to design and build stages and sleighs that were more suited to the primitive road conditions and sub-zero climate. One improvement was a unique spring designed for the undercarriage.

The metal leaf springs of the Concord became brittle in cold weather. They

snapped with frustrating regularity on the rugged trail. The new springs were made of layers of leather straps, which proved exceptionally durable.

They were similar to those used by stages on the old Cariboo Trail in British Columbia. They were also easier to repair and replace, although they made for a bumpier ride. The new springs were called "thorough-braces" and they enabled coaches to carry 14-passengers – and up to a ton of baggage, mail and freight in the back. The company also built specially designed freight sleds

that could haul up to 3,000 pounds. In the fall, wheeled stages were used before the snow was deep enough for sleighs. They were also used in the spring to get through the slush and mud as the snow and river ice melted. Drivers had to keep their wits about them at all times, especially when a spring had glaciated across the road on a steep mountain slope. Wind often drifted snow and blocked the trail, which had to be shoveled out. In spring and fall travellers had to cope with floods, washouts, mud and rock slides as well as river crossings when ice conditions were dangerous.

## PASSENGER STAGE SERVICE

PASSENGER STAGES WILL RUN ON THE FOLLOWING SCHEDULE, SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE

### SOUTH-BOUND

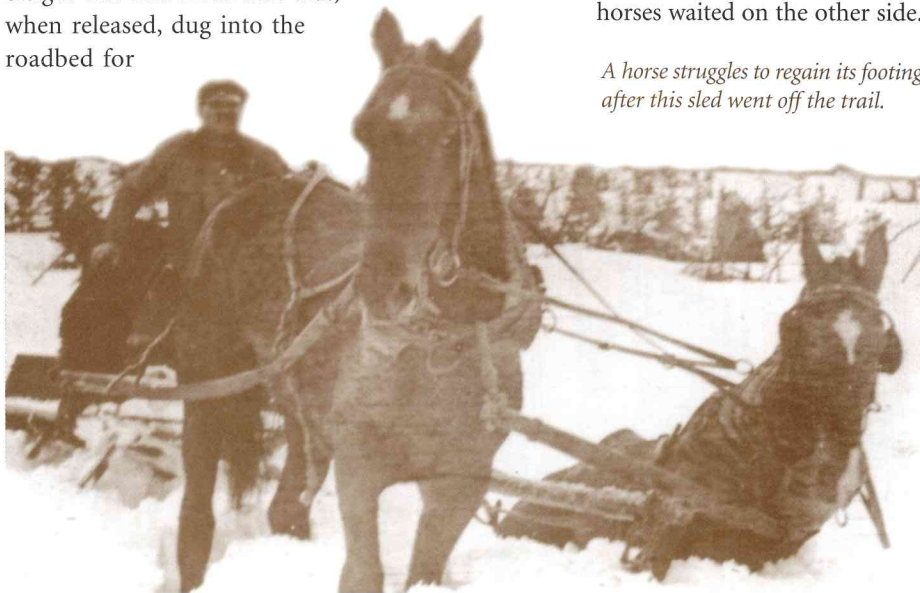
	NUMBER 2		NUMBER 4		NUMBER 6	
	ARRIVE	LEAVE	ARRIVE	LEAVE	ARRIVE	LEAVE
Dawson .....		Mon. 9:00 a.m.		Wed. 2:00 p.m.		Sat. 7:00 a.m.
Indian River .....	Mon. 1:30 p.m.	Mon. 2:30 p.m.	Wed. 6:30 p.m.	Thurs. 6:00 a.m.	Sat. 11:00 a.m.	Sat. 11:30 a.m.
Wounded Moose .....	Mon. 6:30 p.m.	Tues. 6:00 a.m.	Thurs. 10:00 a.m.	Thurs. 10:30 a.m.	Sat. 3:00 p.m.	Sat. 3:30 p.m.
Stewart Crossing .....	Tues. 10:00 a.m.	Tues. 10:30 a.m.	Thurs. 2:30 p.m.	Thurs. 3:30 p.m.	Sat. 7:00 p.m.	Sunday 6:00 a.m.
Stevens .....	Tues. 2:15 p.m.	Tues. 3:15 p.m.	Thurs. 7:15 p.m.	Friday 6:00 a.m.	Sunday 9:30 a.m.	Sunday 10:30 a.m.
Humes .....	Tues. 6:30 p.m.	Wed. 6:00 a.m.	Friday 9:15 a.m.	Friday 10:15 a.m.	Sunday 1:45 p.m.	Sunday 2:45 p.m.
Belly Crossing .....	Wed. 9:15 a.m.	Wed. 9:45 a.m.	Friday 1:30 p.m.	Friday 2:30 p.m.	Sunday 6:00 p.m.	Mon. 6:00 a.m.

There were plenty of mishaps as wheeled stages occasionally upset and sometimes rolled down the hillsides. The wheeled stages had heavy brakes that could lock the rear wheels, which were operated from the driver's seat. Sleights were equipped with chain rough-locks which, when activated by the driver, swung under the runners and tightened. The weight of the sleigh on the chains brought it to a stop. Sleights also had metal bars that, when released, dug into the roadbed for

sudden stops. But there were very few serious accidents as horses instinctively kept their footing and held to the trail. Passengers had little to worry about other than being unceremoniously dumped into a snowbank.

At freeze-up and break-up – when the river ice is at its weakest – people, luggage, mail and freight were laboriously paddled across open water in canoes. Another coach and horses waited on the other side.

*A horse struggles to regain its footing after this sled went off the trail.*



Dawson City Museum, 990.432.19

“Across from me sat an English couple who knew Frank well and who were later to become our close friends – Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Coldrick. She was a plump, pleasant-faced woman who did not care too much for the Yukon and who quite often spent her winters Outside. He was the epitome of the transplanted Englishman. For all of his time in Dawson he wore clothes cut in the English style, a black bowler hat or cloth tweed cap, and carried a tightly rolled umbrella...

“Next to the Coldricks sat a prospector – the typical, grizzled miner of fiction, unshaven, pale-faced, with long, untidy hair, a dirty white collar and a flask in his pocket. Up front beside the driver sat another mining man named Tom Kirkpatrick, who was very jovial and drunk for the entire journey. He had a bottle at all times and continually pulled on it. When we stopped at the various road-houses for meals and he could get no liquor he quite cheerfully drank horse medicine instead. Of all of us, he seemed to have the best time.”

Laura Berton, *ibid*

“One afternoon, after the bottle had been passed frequently down, man after man dropped mysteriously off the sleigh, which slowed down for them. I became curious and was starting to turn about, when Mr. Coldrick stopped me. ‘Don’t look, Miss Thompson!’ The command was urgent and self-explanatory and I closed my eyes on the instant.

“By this time the male passengers could not by any stretch of the imagination be called attractive. Many slept in their clothes, few bothered to shave, and all wore, after the fashion of the day, long moustaches and in some cases beards, from which hung clusters of tiny icicles. When periodically one or another produced a flask and, after taking a healthy swig himself, passed it around, I feigned sleep.”

Laura Berton, *ibid*



Remains of roadhouse at Yukon Crossing.

## Booming the river to speed up transfers

In order to speed up these time-consuming canoe transfers, the White Pass developed an ingenious technique of ‘booming’ the river above each crossing to jam the ice. It was a technique that sprang from the experience of its first stage passenger.

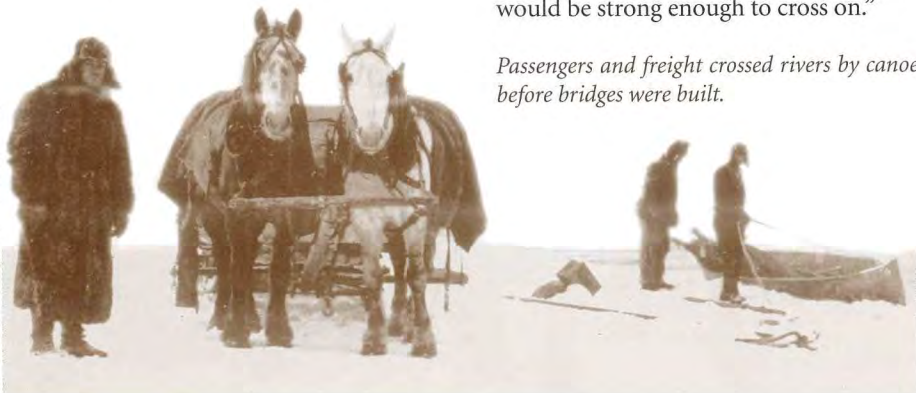
On November 2, 1902, the first overland stage left Whitehorse for Dawson, then the capital of the Yukon. It carried two passengers – Herbert Wheeler, the newly-appointed superintendent of the company, and George Jeckell, a school teacher who

later became Comptroller of the Yukon. Their driver was Billy Cameron.

“When we got to Takhini we found a nice mess,” Wheeler wrote later. “The river had closed with a very light jam of thin ice, most of which was not more than a quarter of an inch thick. The ferry was frozen in at the edge of the river in shore ice, too much ice to break through with the ferry, yet the ice would hardly hold a dog. To make matters worse, it was quite mild, just a few degrees of frost, and it looked as if we might sit there for a week before the ice would be strong enough to cross on.”

*Passengers and freight crossed rivers by canoe before bridges were built.*

Yukon Archives. Coghlan, Charles Coll. 83/19 #1 21

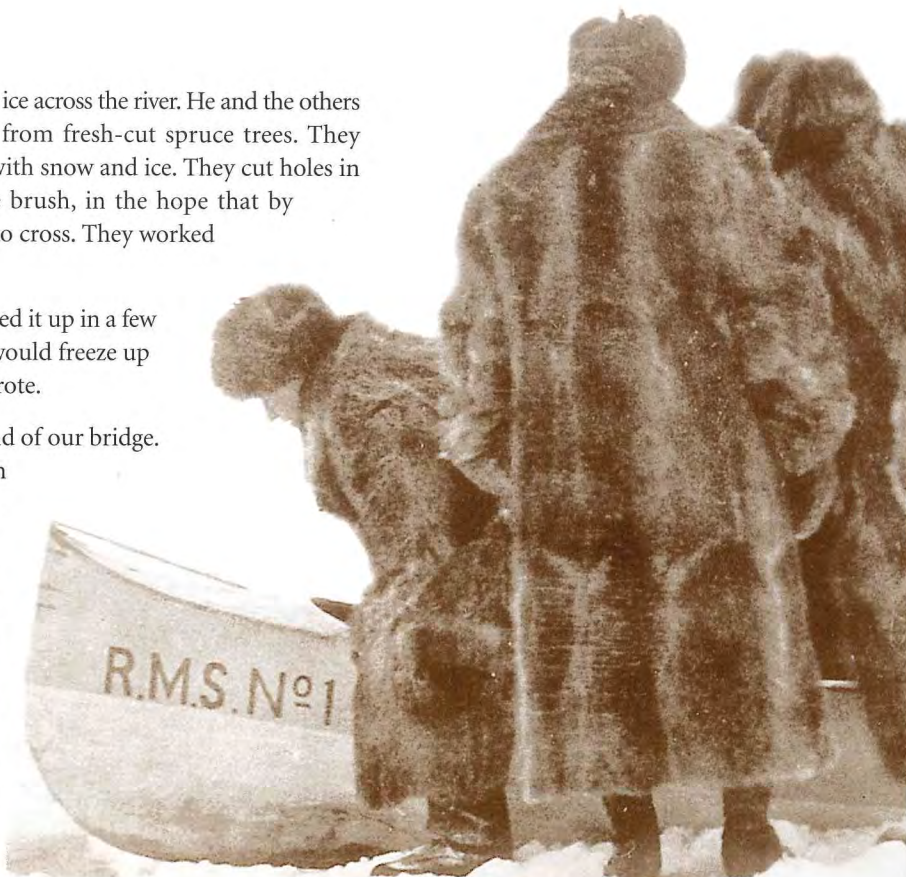


Wheeler then got the idea of building a brush bridge on the ice across the river. He and the others hauled load after load of tree limbs and green brush from fresh-cut spruce trees. They gradually laid the brush across the river, then packed it with snow and ice. They cut holes in the ice to draw water and sprinkled it all through the brush, in the hope that by morning it would freeze into a mat solid enough for all to cross. They worked until 10 p.m. and then went to bed.

“We got up very early and took a look at our bridge, patched it up in a few places, and sprinkled a little more water on it, so that it would freeze up a little more while we were having breakfast,” Wheeler wrote.

“After breakfast we hauled the stage down to the south end of our bridge. We tried the bridge first with small loads on a hand sleigh and we got all the mail, baggage and express across safely. So far so good. Then we looked at one another and I said to Billy, ‘Let’s try a horse. Pick the poorest one and take the harness off him.’ So we led our horse across, then the second, third and fourth, all safely – Eureka! When we got the four horses across, we harnessed them and blanketed them, tied them up to trees and gave them a little hay to play with, as there was lots to do yet.”

*Royal Mail Service canoe is hauled onto ice for waiting passengers at Yukon Crossing in November, 1910.*



Yukon Archives: Forrest, Emilie Coll. Pho 131A 80/60 #41

## PASSENGER SERVICE

### RATES OF FARE

Subject to change without notice, the following passenger rates will apply:

#### NORTH AND SOUTHBOUND.

From the close of navigation to December 1st, and from the end of the sleighing season to the opening of navigation, during the time that the wheeled vehicles are used.

First Class.

Between White Horse and Dawson.....\$125.00

Note.—While the wheeled vehicles are in use hand baggage only will be taken, and not to exceed 25 pounds, which will be carried free for each passenger. Heavy baggage, express and freight will be handled when the regular sleighs are in operation. (See under Baggage, page 9.)

#### NORTHBOUND.

From December 1st to March 15th, while sleighs are in use:

First Class.

From White Horse to Dawson..... \$80.00

From March 15th to the end of the sleighing season:

First Class.

From White Horse to Dawson.....\$170.00

#### SOUTHBOUND.

From December 1st to the end of the sleighing season:

First Class.

From Dawson to White Horse..... \$75.00

In figuring rates between Skaguay and Dawson, add \$20.00 in each direction to the White Horse rates.

In figuring rates between Puget Sound and British Columbia ports and Dawson, add \$50.00 in each direction to the White Horse rates.

First-class through tickets include meals and berths on ocean steamers. Tickets in no case include meals and lodging at the road houses between White Horse and Dawson. The regular road house charges are: Meals, \$1.50 each; beds, \$1.00 per night.

Note.—If the passenger fare from White Horse to Dawson is lower than the rate named above,

## The flow of traffic resumes...

They got the stage across—in pieces. They dismantled it on one side of the river, carried and dragged the pieces across, then reassembled it on the other side.

“The bridge buckled and sagged, and it was like the undulations of a snake, but it didn’t break through, and we got the sleigh across. Thus we inaugurated the ‘Overland’ between Whitehorse and Dawson...

“After this experience we developed a new technique and in subsequent years we

boomed the river. We had the boom all ready and as soon as the ice started to run heavy enough to interfere with the ferry, we ran the boom across and jammed the ice above the ferry until it was strong enough for crossing.” As soon as the ice had frozen, the cable ferries were removed and traffic crossed over the ice formed by the log boom. As a result of these brush bridges, the flow of traffic resumed in days instead of weeks.

Greg Sturce



Well worn and weathered runner is all that remains of this old sleigh.

Horses sometimes broke through the ice on river crossings. As a safeguard, choke-lines were placed around their necks and tightened when necessary, to prevent them from struggling in the water, becoming hopelessly tangled and swept under the ice. This way they could usually be cut loose and floated to where they could be pulled out on solid ice or ground.

As soon as the snow was deep enough the wheeled stages were replaced by sleighs, which were drawn by teams of four to six horses. And with bells on their harnesses,

they jingled all the way. The sleighs made better time than the stages because their runners glided easily over the snow-covered trail. As a result, fares were considerably cheaper in the winter.

A one-way ticket cost \$125. The fare dropped to \$75 from December 1 to the end of the sleighing season and rose to \$100 from March 15 to the opening of river navigation. Roadhouse meals and beds cost extra. Passengers were allowed 25 pounds of luggage free. Excess baggage was 30-cents a pound. In some cases, if

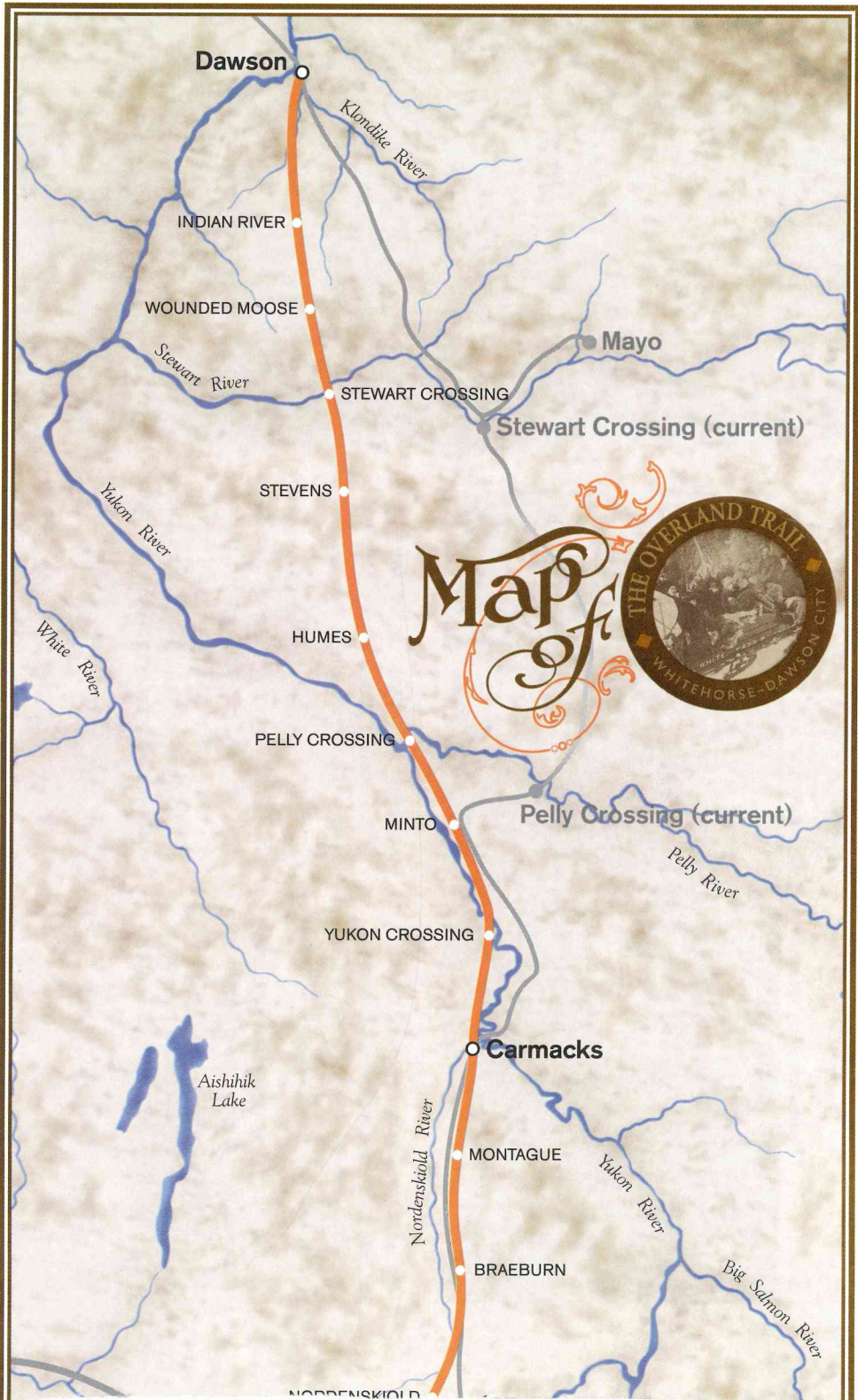


Passengers pose with the mail sleigh at Post No. 3 of the Canadian Development Co., Lower Lebarge.

“While we make good time now, it does not compare to the rush trips of early days when Klondike kings paid the price for rushing through. I think I hold the record for the fastest time ever made by stage from Whitehorse to Dawson. I made the trip in the spring of 1901, and brought down that trip the famous ‘Count’ Carboneau and the countess – erstwhile Belinda Mulrooney – and Chief Wills of the Bank of Commerce...

“Only a day ahead of us Authier started down the trail with the Klondike king ‘Big Alec’, more properly Alexander McDonald. It was the intention to smash the record with that rig. I got the tip, and the ‘Count’ and the ‘Chief’ and the rest of them were anxious to beat the ‘King’ in. So I gave the nags the bud, and away we went. I made it into Dawson and arrived only four hours behind the other rig. We came down the trail that trip in three days and nine hours from Whitehorse to Dawson, and I am sure there never was faster time made between the two places by winter rig.”

Simon ‘Simmie’ Feindel was a stage driver on the Overland Trail for nearly 20 years. His retirement account was published in the Dawson Daily News, May 5, 1920



Dawson

Klondike River

INDIAN RIVER

WOUNDED MOOSE

Stewart River

STEWART CROSSING

Mayo

Stewart Crossing (current)

STEVENS

Yukon River

Map of



HUMES

White River

PELLY CROSSING

Pelly Crossing (current)

MINTO

Pelly River

YUKON CROSSING

Carmacks

Aishihik Lake

Nordenskiöld River

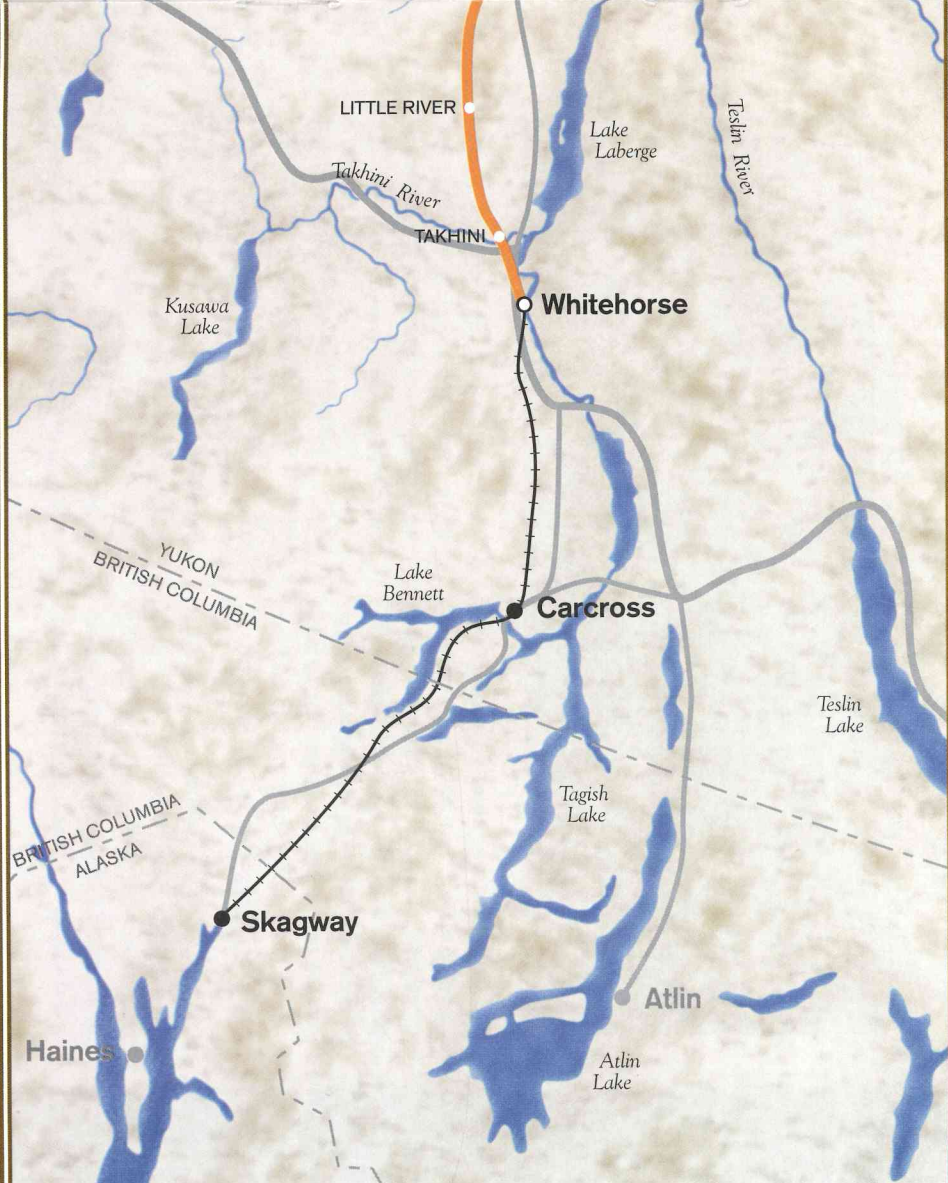
MONTAGUE

Yukon River





BRAEBURN

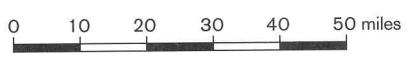
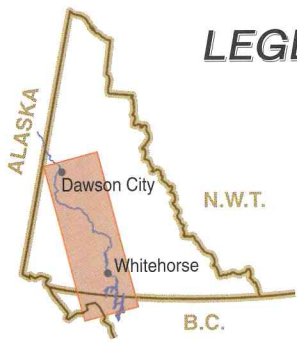
Big Salmon River

NORDENSKIÖLD



**LEGEND** *the Original White Pass Route of 1905*

-  Overland Trail
-  Roadhouse
-  White Pass and Yukon Route Railway
-  Present-day Highways



“Was awakened at 4:30 a.m. by Mrs. Whalen, and the Pelly River was running into the roadhouse; in five minutes we were walking around the rooms waist deep. There was a large canoe, upside down, tied to a tree across the road. Ice was floating by in big blocks. Ernie and I found two paddles floating and we at once swam across, righted the canoe and brought it to the front door. We then took the women folks and Mr. Tyrrel (a ‘coloured helper’ at the roadhouse), clad only in their nightshirts, to dry ground a mile away. Ernie and I then paddled to the barn and found the horses almost covered with water. After two hours struggle we got five of them to shallower water, but one was drowned.

“Got up at day-break, had some canned peas for breakfast ... We are in hard luck, most everything is in the cellar and none of us can dive. Then came back to Pleasant Camp as we had named it. We had found a small keg of rum floating around which was soon put to good use.”

*From the diary of White Pass stage driver A.W. Haddock, April 30-May 1, 1904*

## A first-class relay stage line to Dawson

there was too much freight, passengers were made to get out and walk or run behind the horse-drawn stage. Travel was during the daytime only and at night passengers would board at one of the roadhouses along the trail.

In 1902 the White Pass published a pamphlet to tell the world that there was a year-round transportation service between

Skagway, Alaska, and Dawson City. It advertised its narrow-gauge rail service between Skagway and Whitehorse, and promoted the Overland Trail as a first-class relay stage line to Dawson.

People who braved the winter journey had to be well dressed because the sleighs—like the stages—were uncovered. They wore fur coats, fur hats with nose and ear protectors



Yukon Archives: Back Coll. 90/19 #178

*Scenic winter view of the early settlement of Carmacks from the Overland Trail.*

and well-insulated footwear such as felt shoes or moccasins. On the floor the company provided a metal box which burned coal or was stuffed with heated bricks to keep feet warm. It also provided buffalo robes for added warmth.

The stage drivers, or 'skinner' as they were called, wore coon-skin fur coats with long red sashes tied around their waists, and soft fur-backed leather gloves with silk or woolen liners. On very cold days they often held the reins in one hand and used the other to beat their shoulder to keep up blood circulation. The 'seat of honour', reserved for favoured passengers in favourable weather, was beside the driver.

Yukon Archives: H.C. Barley Coll. #5127



*With bells on their harness, horses jingled all the way from Whitehorse to Dawson City.*

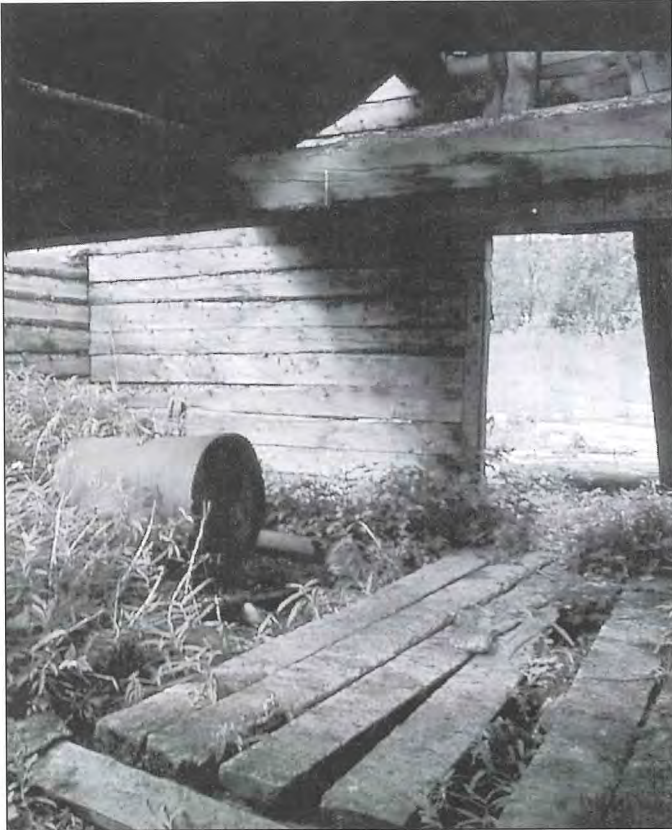
Many travellers would wait in Whitehorse or Dawson for days in order to ride with their preferred driver. Among the more

popular drivers were 'Simmy' Feindel, 'Dummy' Coghlan, 'Hobo Bill' Donnenworth, Billy Cameron, George

**ROYAL MAIL SERVICE.**  
**CANADIAN DEVELOPMENT COMPANY, LIMITED.**

**POST REGISTER.**

DATE.	No. OF TRIP.	FROM	TO	TIME OF ARRIVAL.	TIME OF DEPARTURE.	REMARKS, OR CAUSE OF DELAY, IF ANY.	SIGNATURE OF TEAMSTER.
Oct 29 <sup>th</sup>	2	Whitehorse	Belleisle Dawson	3 P.M.	Oct 30 <sup>th</sup> 12.00	Carrion went to Belleisle to see how the ice	H. Alexander, P. Harrison
" 30 <sup>th</sup>	"	"	Selkirk	1 P.M.	Oct 31 <sup>st</sup> 7 A.M.	Returned on account of ice	P. Harrison H. Alexander
Nov 1 <sup>st</sup>	3	Post. No. 10	Post. No. 9	5.30 P.M.	Nov 1 <sup>st</sup> 7 A.M.		W. V. Vadville



*Remains of this building still stand at Yukon Crossing.*

## An average, a journey on the

Keeler, George Webster, Charlie Chinery, 'Skookum' McAdam, Jim Gannon, 'Jeff' Jefferson, 'Hard Face' Reeves, Ernie Burwash, George Howes, Bill Powell, Ed Spahr and Joe 'High Priest' McDonald.

The trip between Whitehorse and Dawson took anywhere from three to 10 days depending on the season, the trail and weather conditions. The average journey took five days. Each day, three or four scheduled stops were made at outposts, which were about 20 to 25 miles apart. At each stop passengers ate and rested while the teams of horses were changed. Tired steeds were rubbed down, blanketed, fed and put into log stables heated by wood stoves. Fresh horses were hitched to the sleigh for the next leg of the journey. Meals cost \$1.50 and beds were \$1.00 a night. Private rooms, if available, were \$2.00 a night or more.

These stops were a welcome respite for drivers, passengers and horses. Each post generally consisted of a roadhouse, stables, storehouses, cabins, separate outhouses for men and women, and huge stacks of firewood. Roadhouses were fairly uniform, which was largely due to government regulations. They were one or two-storey log buildings chinked with moss. Their roofs were covered with moss and dirt for insulation. Their furniture was homemade and rustic. Kerosene lamps and candles provided light. Some even had bathtubs, although water had to be hauled and heated.

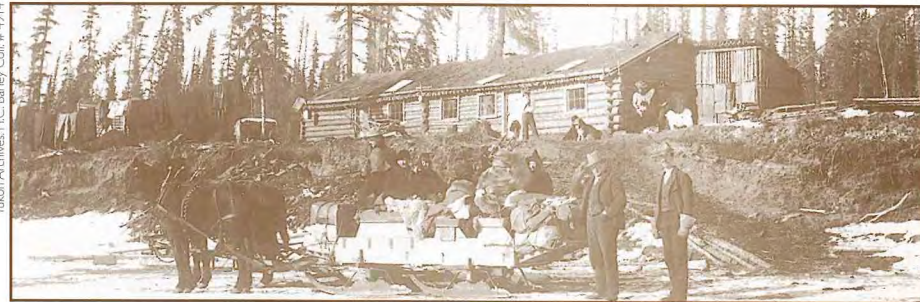
## Overland Trail took five days

A typical 1920s roadhouse on the Overland Trail was described by Laura Berton in her book *I Married the Klondike*:

“In one general room stood the familiar giant heater around which was built an iron rack on which we hung our wet gauntlets, scarves and coats. Beside this was a long table absolutely jammed with hot food – roast moose, caribou, mountain sheep, native blueberry pie and huge dishes of baked beans. As I was travelling alone I was allotted a tiny cubicle with a bed to

myself. The single men slept in bunks, which in the smaller posts were all in the main room.”

Roadhouses that had liquor licenses – and most of them did – were required to have at least six comfortable bedrooms, a sitting room and dining room all separate from the bar, where a shot of Seagram’s rye whisky cost 50 cents and a 26-ounce bottle cost \$1.50. These and other regulations were strictly enforced by the North-West Mounted Police.



*It was laundry day at this roadhouse when the C.D. Company sleigh arrived.*

“The trail wound from one valley into another, crossing great divides, now skirting the frozen river, now swinging along the edge of a huge bluff, or running through frost-silvered forests. The stages carried the Canadian mail, so they were known as Royal Mail stages, and the company as the Royal Mail Service. Among the fur-wrapped passengers were to be seen the faces of Klondike kings, card sharps, ministers, barkeepers, judges, business men, Indians who had struck it rich, men fleeing from debts and men rushing northward from a civilization that had broken them to begin life all over again.

“There were no rules of the road on the Dawson trail. The stages had the right of way, for the Royal Mail knew no obstacles. It is said that in the long list of stage drivers not one was to be found who had ever abused the right of way. The drivers carried no horns or bugles, but often gave notice of their approach to a sharp curve with a weird malamute yell, echoing through the frozen hills.”

*William D. MacBride, Yukon historian, excerpt from his article Yukon Stage Line in The Beaver magazine, June 1953.*

"Some interesting reports were received from stablemen at the various posts:

'Horse 182 he's dead. He jus lay down and die. He was awful thin.'

'Last month I write you send down a harness for old Billy. You send harness but you don't send collar. Now how in hell can a horse pull without a collar?' "

*William D. MacBride, Yukon historian, excerpt from his article Yukon Stage Line in The Beaver magazine, June 1953.*



*Kettle, a rusted relic from the past, hangs from a tree along the modern day trail.*

## There were some shocking exceptions...

By the 1920s, roadhouse meals were generally highly regarded. There were, however, some shocking exceptions. One stopping-place on the road to the Keno silver mines was described as being run by two men who were "...incredibly filthy with long, greasy uncombed hair, unshaven faces, grease-ringed mouths and short, dirty mackinaws. Snow containing

sawdust, rabbit turds and occasional urination was melted for water and black moosemeat, coated with dirt and gravel from the floor, was cut into a greasy pan without cleaning and served with a cup of muddy coffee." This indignity cost hungry travellers \$1.50 and it's doubtful that anyone who survived it left a tip.

Yukon Archives, Coghlin, Charles Coll. 83/19 #46



*There was no room for passengers on these sleighs outside Montague Roadhouse.*

The White Pass, however, ran some of the best roadhouses in the North. Some were owned outright by the company with hired staff, others were leased to the operators, while a few were privately owned with service contracts to the White Pass.

Roadhouses were a vital factor in winter transportation, not only on the Overland Trail but in other areas where extreme cold and bad weather required frequent stops. Drivers generally did not leave a post if the temperature was lower than 40 degrees below zero. It was not uncommon to start out at 20 below in the morning and encounter 60 below by evening.

If a roadhouse thermometer wasn't available, a bottle of Perry Davis Painkiller was placed outside for a few minutes. If it froze, it was generally accepted that it was too cold for man or beast to travel.

But while they were havens to all for the food, rest and warmth that they offered, they were also firetraps. The Montague Roadhouse near Carmacks was first built

about 1900 and was destroyed by fire. The second Montague, built at a different site, also went up in flames. It was rebuilt a third time in 1915 and remained in service until the 1950s. In 1993 the Yukon government's Heritage Branch decided to stabilize the remaining four walls rather than restore the entire building. The Montague is the only remaining Overland Trail roadhouse directly on the modern Klondike Highway, and it's still a popular roadside photo-stop for travellers. The restored Carmacks roadhouse is a two-minute drive off the Highway in that community.

In 1907 the Yukon government passed an ordinance that required every roadhouse over one storey to install a fire escape from every upstairs bedroom. Owners and operators responded in typical frontier fashion – they coiled a rope at each upstairs window or emergency exit. In the event of a fire, guests were expected to dress quickly, let down the rope and slide their way to safety.

Greg Stouck



*Display at MacBride Museum depicts a typical hotel room at the turn of the century.*

## Some took the stage, some skied...

While most of the traffic along the winter trail belonged exclusively to the White Pass, a small number of independent stages used the Overland Trail. It also wasn't unusual to see skiers making their way along the trail, pulling small packs or sleds of provisions behind them. Many old-timers still remember the days when men, who couldn't afford to take the stage, skied from

Whitehorse to Dawson in the spring in order to get summer jobs on the sternwheelers. If they waited until the boats started running, all the jobs would be taken. Such work on the river was seasonal and, in some cases, men who worked on the riverboats in the summer spent the winter working as cooks in roadhouses.

Between 200 and 275 horses were used by the White Pass along the Overland Trail during the winter season. An average of 15 teams of 4 horses each were used for a single trip. Each horse had a number stamped on a front hoof and every one had a name. The company employed a veterinarian at Whitehorse where it had large stables and a horse hospital.

Greg Stacey



Hay still grows, but the barn is long gone from Myers Roadhouse, 10 km north of Carmacks.

RECORDS FILE  
FILE #53 - CANADIAN EQUIPMENT MAIL  
CONTRACTS - SIKAGAM OFFICE  
DPT 412  
Whitehorse, Y.T., Oct. 5, 1920.

Conrad and Zastner,  
Dawson, Y.T.

Reached Whitehorse noon today stop. Will sell you all feed on line at eight and half cents per pound conditional you take it all this price is for cash soon as inventory taken stop To have stables at every post on the line from Tahkoona to Black Hills inclusive and at Yukon Crossing Belly Crossing and Stewart Crossing stables on both sides river stop. All stables have stoves, water barrels and every convenience like go-dovils water sleigh tanks etc., stop. We will lease these buildings for twenty five hundred dollars for two years payable half on January first 1921 and half January first 1922 stop. There is lots miscellaneous rigging on line such as lead bars shovels and tools various kinds which will, for reasonable prices but this

Other veterinarians travelled the route and tended to the needs of horses at the various outposts. It also operated its own carriage and sleigh, harness and blacksmith shops.

In the summer months, when company sternwheelers resumed service on the Yukon River, the horses were pastured in Yukon meadows to roam and fatten up for the next winter's service. Summer care included painting vulnerable parts of their anatomy with a mixture of tar and insect-repelling oils to protect them from swarms

Yukon Archives, Bad. Coll. 90/19 #32



*A six-horse team and freight wagon pulls away from the stables, 1914.*

of bloodthirsty mosquitoes, black gnats and other biting insects. In the winter their diet consisted of bran mash, oats and timothy hay – most of which was imported from the West Coast because it had more nutrition than locally-grown hay. Like most animals, the horses grew long hair in winter as added protection against the cold. Before resuming work each fall, the upper parts of their bodies were clipped to prevent them from steaming and frosting up while working.

Yukon Archives, Forrest, Emilie Coll. 80/60 #16



*People who couldn't afford to buy a ticket travelled on foot, on skis, by bicycle or dog team.*

“Independence houses were cheap, with only curtains separating the rooms, and some of these were dirty, miserable two-room cabins that charged \$2.00 per meal and \$2.00 per night, whether you slept in a bunk or on the floor in a canvas. Guests might be grudgingly greeted or ignored and fed fried snowshoe rabbit, half-raw grizzly bear steaks, stringy old caribou or beaver legs with frost-blackened potatoes and whatever else was cheap. Hotcakes might be cold and tough, coffee lukewarm and poisonous, eggs strong and deep-coloured, meat suspicious-tasting and cans rusted, with contents comminuted and bulged from repeated freezings.

“One ... owner used to pick tobacco out of his teeth with the same fork that he used to fry the frozen grayling that were caught nearby and fed to travellers. Another place, on the main road, was described by Major Neville Armstrong as a small log cabin with a gravel floor, six dirty spruce pole bunks and a filthy stove and cooking table...Such conditions were said to ‘appease hunger without eating and led to prayers that the night would pass quickly so one could get away.’”

*Aaro Aho, unpublished manuscript, Yukon Archives (MSS 11, #82/161)*

"Mrs. Humphries of the Arlington roadhouse, on Hunker, was before Captain Wroughton in the police court this morning on a charge of selling liquor to William Tyrrell, an interdicted man. Mrs. Humphries proved that she did not know Tyrrell was under interdiction, and the case was dismissed. The charge was laid by Mrs. Tyrrell."

*Dawson Daily News, June 3, 1904*

In 1902 liquor licences cost \$1,550 in Dawson City, \$1,300 in Whitehorse and \$300 elsewhere in the territory. By contrast, similar licences in B.C. were \$200 everywhere.

*Whitehorse Star*



*Remains of an old window frame.*

## Automobiles take to the trail...

To prevent their lungs from being 'burned' – a fatal condition to people and animals caused by breathing in very cold air – protectors were placed over their chests and a bag-like contraption was placed over their nostrils. Horses whose lungs had been burned usually died in the spring or early summer, but such losses were few.

According to H.J. Woodside, editor of the Yukon Sun, there were three automobiles in *First automobile sets out to drive from Dawson to Whitehorse in 1912.*

the Dawson area by September of 1901. Cars in the Yukon remained a novelty for the next 10 years, mainly because of the primitive road system in the territory. Because sternwheelers were a more reliable and cheaper means of transportation, road construction to accommodate cars and trucks was delayed on a large scale until the 1940s.

The first car to drive the Overland Trail completed the journey in 1912. For the first few years cars could only travel during the dry summer months, and in the fall before the snowfall became too heavy.

Dawson City Museum, 984R-176-4



But two years later, enough motor vehicles were using it that speed limits were imposed on the trail and in Dawson City.

Klondike mining promoter Joe Boyle and his wife left Dawson in mid-December of 1912 in an attempt to drive to Whitehorse in their 20 hp Flanders car. Bad road conditions – and a 1,500-pound load in the car – forced them to abandon the car and catch a White Pass stage for the last part of their trip.

A few days later their attempt was upstaged by the arrival in Whitehorse of Commissioner George Black and C.A. Thomas of the Yukon Gold Co. in Thomas' 60 h.p. Locomobile, which was driven by chauffeur George Potter. Driving time from Dawson was 35 1/2 hours. "Tires were worn down to the canvas and nearly everything loose that was not riveted," Black reported. After making necessary repairs in Whitehorse they started on the

return trip, but the Locomobile broke down just north of the Pelly River. The weary trio arrived in Dawson by stage on New Year's Eve.

In 1904 and 1905 the first winter stage route was built between Dawson City and Duncan Creek. At that time a Liberal government was in power and the route was dubbed 'The Liberal Trail'. From Dawson it travelled the Dominion Creek road for some distance, then down the Tintina Trench to Barlow (with a branch to Clear Creek), then to McQuesten, Moose Creek and Mayo. Later, when a Conservative government was elected, the route was changed and the new road became known as 'The Conservative Trail'. It remained the same from

Dawson to Barlow, then moved to Clear Creek, along Vancouver Creek, crossed the McQuesten River and up Bear Creek to Minto Bridge. The merits of the two trails often depended on one's political affiliation. Some said the Conservative Trail was drier and faster while others insisted that the Liberal Trail was shorter.

*Tire chains helped this heavily-loaded truck, shown here at Braeburn.*



Yukon Archives. Coghlan, Charles. Coll. B37/19 #B4

## “Skinners” become “cat skimmers” – stables become garages –

During 1914-15, improvements were made to the trail itself to better accommodate motor vehicles – and to the river crossings on the Yukon, Pelly and Stewart rivers where cable ferries were installed that could handle six-horse teams and wagons. An overhead carrier was also built at Yukon Crossing to transfer freight, passengers and mail when ice was running on the river.

The golden age of the Overland Trail ended in the spring of 1921 when the White Pass gave up its mail contract and the winter transportation service.

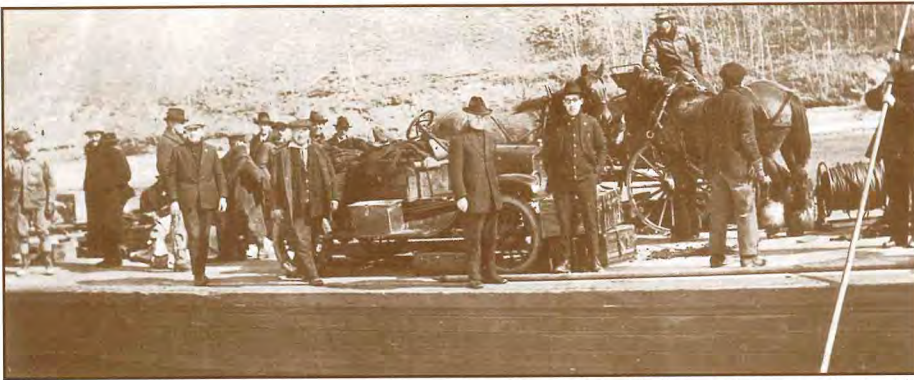
After the 1920s mining activity decreased and roadhouses along the trail began to deteriorate. Passenger transport was not a high priority with the contractors who took over the winter mail and freight

service. After that, winter travel between Whitehorse and Dawson was carried out by various contractors who used trucks and Caterpillar tractors, or ‘cat trains’ which could haul anywhere from four to seven sleighs and cabooses. The ‘skinners’ who used to drive the stages now became ‘cat skimmers’. With the use of these new vehicles, stage relays were no longer needed. The majority of roadhouses along the trail were phased out and many of the stables were converted to garages.

After airplane service arrived in the territory in the late 1920s, a string of emergency air fields was built adjacent to the Overland Trail. Travellers ultimately preferred the quick flights between Whitehorse and Dawson.

Only a few of the original roadhouses survive in the Yukon, in varying degrees of soundness. Fires have destroyed many and nature has taken its toll of the rest.

Yukon Archives. Coghlan, Charles Coll. 83/19 #75



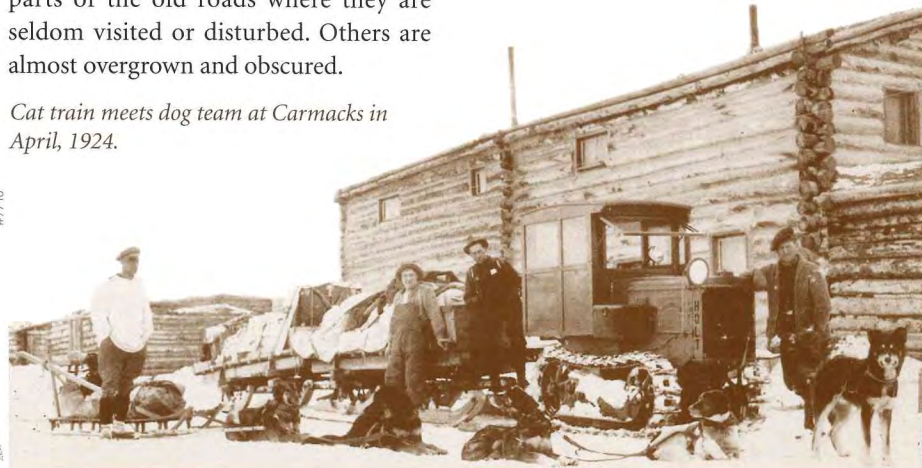
*River Crossing – the man with the barge pole at right pushes off the cable ferry. In later years ferries like this one were built to accommodate both cars and horse teams.*

## the Overland Trail becomes memories

The Yukon government has stabilized the Montague roadhouse. The Carmacks Roadhouse had its exterior restored in 1996-97 by the Village of Carmacks as part of centennial celebrations. Remains of the roadhouse at Yukon Crossing still stand on the Yukon River, about halfway between Whitehorse and Dawson. Ruins of others are visible at Bishop Creek, Calder Summit and Minto. They sit, like forgotten monuments to a bygone era, on abandoned parts of the old roads where they are seldom visited or disturbed. Others are almost overgrown and obscured.

*Cat train meets dog team at Carmacks in April, 1924.*

The overland journey from Whitehorse to Dawson City used to take seven and a half days when the rivers were open, and about five days when they were frozen. Today the drive takes about six hours along the paved Klondike Highway. Or you can make the trip by plane in a little over an hour. While these modern means offer speed and comfort, nothing compares to the romance or the rich history of the Yukon's first highway – The Overland Trail.



Yukon Archives, Claude B. Trépo, #7740

“On January 9, Joseph Legler, proprietor of the Middle LaBarge roadhouse, was found dead on Lake LaBarge about a mile and a half south of his roadhouse, having died from exposure. He had been to White Horse for supplies and returning to his roadhouse while a fierce storm was raging evidently lost his way, got played out and succumbed to the cold ...”

*From the 1902 North-West Mounted Police Annual Report*



*White Pass sleigh on the trail in March, 1906.*

Dawson City Museum 99-251110

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*Today, this is all that remains of the roadhouse and an out-building at Minto.*

Gang Shure



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OVERLAND TRAIL