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TAZLINA LAKE HISTORICAL REPORT

By

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The historical research conducted on the Tazlina Lake area, which is located in the Copper River drainage, is part of the Division of Geological and Geophysical Survey program to provide cultural and historical data which can be used to evaluate the historical and cultural significance of specific areas and sites. The Tazlina Lake area is being considered as part of the state's land disposal program. This report, which provides a regional overview, was prepared through archival research, and does not include field research. The Division of Geological and Geophysical Survey conducted archaeological field surveys on the shores of Tazlina Lake in 1982 and 1983, an evaluation of which can be found in Doug Reger's 1984 report, included within this publication.

Coming out of the Chugach Mountains in a northerly direction, Tazlina Glacier feeds Tazlina Lake, a 21 mile (54 km) long lake that has also been known as Lake Pluvezna, Plavazhnoi, Pleveznie (Orth 1966), Plavezhnoe (Tikhmenev 1888), Plavojni and Bantil-bana (Doroshin 1866) Mantilbana or Mantylbana (Wrangell 1839), Tazlena Lake and Bendibene' (Kari and Buck 1983), the Ahtna placename. The Tazlina River flows from the east end of the lake and empties into the Copper River, about 30 miles away. "Tazlina" is an Indian word which means "fast water" and "comes down from large lake" (Selkregg 1977).

The lake is not accessible by road although the Glenn Highway comes within about fifteen miles of the southern end of the lake. In

the summer the lake can be accessed by float plane or by floating down the Little Nelchina River. The Glenn Highway crosses the Little Nelchina River 137 miles from Anchorage, the site of a state park campground. The Little Nelchina flows into Nelchina River which then flows into Tazlina Lake, providing a water access to the lake from the highway. It is about a 20 mile (52 km) fast white water river trip to the lake. In winter the lake can be accessed by air with a plane on skis and by winter trails on snowmachine, dog sled, cross country skis, or snow shoes.

Tazlina Lake is located on the route of an aboriginal trail which linked the Copper River to Cook Inlet. The area was also occupied by the Tyone-Mendeltna band of the northern Athapaskan Ahtna Indians in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

#### Review of Literature

In the historical literature the few direct references to Tazlina Lake are made most often in connection with the aboriginal trail from Cook Inlet to Copper River which went up the Matanuska River valley to Tazlina Lake, then down the Tazlina River to the Copper River. Another important trail penetrated deeper into the interior heading north from Tazlina Lake to Lake Louise then northeast through the Mentasta Pass to the Tanana River, accessing the Yukon River. The Russians and Americans alike were interested in routes of travel that linked the coast with interior Alaska. They launched explorations to investigate these trails and gather information about the resources and people found in the vast territory (Serebrennikov 1847; Doroshin 1866; Dall 1870; Tikhmenev 1888; Abercrombie 1900; Allen 1900; Mendenhall 1900; Rafferty 1900, Schrader 1900; Gibson 1976). These

trails and others linked the Ahtna, the native inhabitants of the Copper River drainage, to a widespread trading network which involved other Athapaskans, Eskimo, coastal Eyak, Tlingit, and the Chukchi of Siberia (de Laguna and McClellan 1981). During the gold rush era prospectors used the aboriginal trails as well as established their own routes to access mineralized areas in the interior.

For historical background of the Copper River region William Hanable's (1982) Alaska's Copper River, The 18th and 19th Centuries provides a good overview of the Russian and American explorations and interests in the region, and the native inhabitants they encountered. Hanable's account of the Copper River brings us up to the eve of the major copper discoveries in the Wrangell Mountains which created a major impact on the lower Copper River and Chitina River valleys, located to the south and east of Tazlina Lake.

Ethnographic work by McClellan and de Laguna (1981) on the Athapaskan speaking Ahtna provides information on resource use, settlement patterns, socio-political organization, economic activities and interrelations with other native groups and whites. Reckford (1979, 1983) provides twentieth century settlement pattern and subsistence information in a case study of Copper Center and a subsistence study for the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Another source of ethnographic information are the government expedition reports of the late 19th century and early 20th century, a time when the Ahtna were still leading a semi-nomadic subsistence based way of life that included trapping furs for trade goods (Abercrombie 1900; Allen 1900; Castner 1900; Learnard 1900; Rafferty 1900; Schrader 1900). Although the Russians had

little extended contact with the Ahtna, there is some ethnographic and population information included in various Russian documents, including Doroshin (1866), Wrangell (1939), and Tikhmenev (1888). In one of his reports Baranov listed the Mednovsty, the Russian name for the Ahtna (various spellings of Mednovsty appear in the literature), as one of the independent tribes in the colony not subject to colonial administration (Tikhmenev 1888, p. 82). Ethnographic place names can be found in the Ahtna Place Names Book (Kari and Buck 1983).

In the 1970s, the construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline and the native claims settlement stimulated archaeological, historical and socio-economic studies, especially along the pipeline corridor which passes through the Copper River Valley. Until that time there was little published work on the Copper River area. Some of the earlier works include Rainey (1939) and Van Stone (1955) and Irving (1957). For later works see Workman (197<sup>1</sup>~~6~~, 1977<sup>6</sup>), Arndt (1977), Reckford (1979, 1983) and Shinkwin (1979). Doug Reger's Division of Geological and Geophysical archaeological survey and evaluation report on Tazlina Lake is currently under publication.

Prospectors filed mining claims in the Tazlina Lake area in the early 1880s, but it was the Gold Rush of 1898-1899 that brought large numbers of people into the Copper River region. Diaries and books written by prospectors mining in the Copper River region include Powell (1909), Remington (1939), Basil (1968), Conger (1983), Reid (n.d.), and Steinmetz (n.d.). Military expedition and Geological Survey reports of the late 19th and early 20th century provide information on prospectors and mining activity. The Compilations Of Narratives Of Explorations In Alaska (1900) is a collection of

government reports dating from 1869 to 1899, including those of Abercrombie, Allen, Castner, Glenn, Schrader and Learnard.

In the Copper River drainage to the south and east of Tazlina Lake, copper mining and railroad construction had a major impact on the Chitina Valley and Cordova, but little impact outside those areas. Discussion of the discovery of copper and its development by the Alaska Syndicate and the Kennecott Copper Corporation, can be found in several works including Jansen (1975), Stearn (1975), Graumann (n.d.), Sullivan (n.d.). The controversial Morgan-Guggenheim Syndicate, which developed the Kennecott Copper Mines was a major economic and political force in Alaska in the early 20th century. Opinion as to the role of the Alaska Syndicate in Alaska development is divided between those viewing it as a negative exploitative force and those seeing it as a positive developmental force.

Community profiles and planning studies written in the 1970s and early 1980s provide contemporary information on the Copper River Basin highway communities (Ahtna, Inc. et al 1973; Reckford 1979; Selkregg and Cross 1981; Stoltzfus 1982). The studies provide population figures and information on the types of services and facilities available in each community.

#### Russian Era

Acting on information Captain Cook shared with the Russians in 1778, three ships were sent from Unalaska, a Russian headquarters site, in 1783 to Prince William Sound to find new hunting grounds. Fur bearing animals were already scarce along the Alaska Peninsula due to over hunting. Although hunting on this expedition was not successful because of hostilities with the Chugach Eskimos, one of the

scouting parties lead by Nagaev sighted the mouth of the Copper River (Hanable 1982). From that time until 1847, the Russians conducted sporadic explorations of the Copper River, but they never established a substantial presence there.

In 1793, Russian hunters and traders working for the Russian merchant Lebedev Lastochkin established a trading outpost at Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island. The outpost was called Saint Constantine and Helen Redoubt. Strategically located about 30 miles west of the mouth of the Copper River, the redoubt later continued operation under the Russian American Company, and after the purchase of Alaska from Russia, under the Alaska Commercial Company. In addition to a trading center, it served as a launching area for exploring parties ascending the Copper River. On the east shore of the Copper River, below the confluence of the Copper River and the Chitina River, the Russians sporadically supported single trader outposts from 1820 to 1835 and later from 1847 to 1860. The latter outpost, known as Taral, was also an Athna village site.

During his tenure as manager of the Russian-American Company between 1790 and 1818, Baranov was reportedly interested in finding copper in the colonies for use in ship building (Hanable 1982). Baranov's account of one futile Russian attempt to find the source of copper in the Copper River region can be found in Tikhmenev's A History of the Russian-American Company (1888):

The inhabitants of Copper River, in whose neighborhood copper ores were supposed to exist, agreed to show a Russian from the trading post in Chugach Bay places rich in copper, but they took him only about three hundred versts [200 miles] up the river far from the mountain summits on the pretext that they were enemies of the mountain tribes who,

according to them, lived by war and even slept with their weapons. 'The Copper River people,' wrote Baranov, 'gave ten men as hostages, but pay little attention to that, for they have a brutal character and deceive the Russians constantly' (1888, p. 86).

From their own explorations and information gathered from Indian informants, the Russians knew of the aboriginal trail between Cook Inlet and Copper River, and another trail from there to the Yukon. They were also aware of a large lake [Tazlina Lake], along the trail route. Potochkin, an early Russian explorer who travelled up the Copper River in 1798-99, reported in his journal that Indians informed him that the Copper River flowed from a large lake which in turn was fed by other rivers, although he did not see the lake himself (Hanable 1982, p.20). The Russians also believed that Susitna River which drains into the Cook Inlet flowed from the same large lake.

In 1843 the Russians sent an exploring party up the Susitna River and another up the Copper River to find Tazlina Lake and establish a trading post there. At that time the Russians also believed it was only a short portage to the Yukon River, thus making Tazlina Lake a strategic location in controlling the water ways and fur trade. Some furs from the interior reached the Hudson Bay Company via an Indian trade network and the Russians wished to stop the outflow of furs from their colony. Grigor'ev headed the 1843 Copper River expedition and reached Tazlina Lake, but he did not visit the Upper Ahtna. The Upper Athna, a linguistic and political subdivision of the Athna Indians, lived in the upper drainage of the Copper River and were the most active fur trappers among the Ahtna. Because of the hostility of the Indians encountered in the Copper River drainage, the Russians did not establish a trading post (Dall 1870; Tikhmenev 1888; Hanable 1982).

Competition from Hudson Bay Trading Company, which was penetrating further west along the Yukon River, spurred the Russians on to try once again to establish interior trading posts within the Copper River drainage (Tikhmenev 1888; Hanable 1982). In 1846 Hudson Bay Company established a trading post at Fort Yukon, inside the boundaries of the Russian-American territory. In 1847-48, the Russians sent Ensign Ruf Serebrennikov up the Copper River to find the Yukon or one of its tributaries. He notes in his journal a stop at Tazlina Lake, where he encountered two Mednovski native families hunting (Allen 1900:413; Serebrennikov 1847-48). (The Russians used the name Mednovski or Mednovtsy for the Copper River Indians.) He reported the natives killed four deer swimming in the lake, two of which the Russians purchased for 135 feet of beads. After building a baidarra, a river boat made of skins which could hold about 20 people, the Russian expedition continued its trip up the Copper River. To the Russian explorers the Indians appeared poor and offered little potential market. A few days after departing Tazlina Lake, Serebrennikov and the other expedition members were killed by Upper Ahtna Indians. His journal was returned to the trading post at Nuchek. Reportedly, in addition to having insulted the Ahtna head man, the Ahtna were concerned that the Russians were eliminating their position as middlemen in fur trade with the interior Indians, a lucrative market for the Ahtna (Allen 1900; Tikhmenev 1888; Hanable 1982).

Because of the hostility with the Indians and an unpromising market, the Russians abandoned the idea of establishing a trading post in Upper Ahtna territory. However, a small trading post at Taral,

located on the Copper River approximately 2 miles south of Chitina River, was open sporadically between 1847 and 1860 (Dall 1870; Hanable 1982, p. 29). Also, furs trapped by the Ahtna reached the Russian trading posts either through Indians who acted as middlemen or on an annual trek along the trail which passed through Tazlina Lake to the trading posts in Cook Inlet or down the Copper River to Nuchek in the Prince William Sound. By the late 19th century, the Lower Ahtna were well-established middlemen in the fur trade between the Upper Ahtna and the Russians traders in Prince William Sound.

Other earlier Russian parties exploring the Copper River had also been killed by the Ahtna Indians. The first known deaths occurred in 1796 when Konstantin Alekeevich Samoilov, a Lebedev-Lastochkin trader, and his party ascended the Copper River with Ahtna guides. An Ahtna Indian died after being thrown into the rapids by the Russians on orders from Samoilov, who was angry with the Indian for dropping his tobacco case into the river. Angered by this incident, the remaining Indians killed the Russians (Hanable 1982; Doroshin 1866). A Russian-American Company employee sent by Baranov to explore the Copper River for copper in 1803 tried and failed in two separate trips to find the source of the metal. During a third expedition, the Russian was killed by Indians (Davydov 1977, p.200; Hanable 1982, p. 20). The last Russian exploring party killed on the Copper River, the one headed by Serebrenikov in 1847, was also the last one sent by the Russians.

The Copper River basin was in the territory served by the Russian Orthodox mission located in Kenai. That mission was established in 1845 (Tikhmenev 1888; Dall 1870). Ahtna contact with the Russian

Orthodox religion occurred outside their own territory when they travelled to Cook Inlet to trade with the Russians. The Russian missionaries and the Tanaina Indians introduced Russian Orthodox concepts to the Athna. The Russian Orthodox chapel built in 1863 at Nuchek did not have a priest stationed there until 1898 (Hanable:1982). Consequently, Athna contact with the Russian religion and culture was sporadic and usually occurred outside their own territory.

Reflecting the low level of contact, a 1860 Russian Orthodox Church report on the number of Christians in the colonies, including Russians, Creoles and natives, lists only 18 Christians among the Copper River people out of a total of 12,028 Christians in the Russian colonies. As a comparison with other native groups with whom the Copper River Indians had some contact, the 190 Kolchani, 937 Kenai, 456 Chugach, and 190 Kolosh [Tlingit] were Christians (Tikhmenev 1888, p. 384).

#### Ahtna: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Except for the delta area, the northern Athapaskan Ahtna Indians occupied the entire Copper River valley which is ringed by the Alaska Range, the Chugach Mountains and the Wrangell Mountains. A area covering approximately 23,000 square miles. Tazlina Lake, which has an Ahtna placename of Bendibene', is located in the middle of the Ahtna territory.

The Athna speak a distinct Athapaskan language. The Lower, Middle and Western Ahtna spoke the lower river dialect while the Upper Ahtna spoke a slightly different dialect. The Mentasta band of Ahtna spoke a third dialect (de Laguna and McClellan 1981). Linguistically,

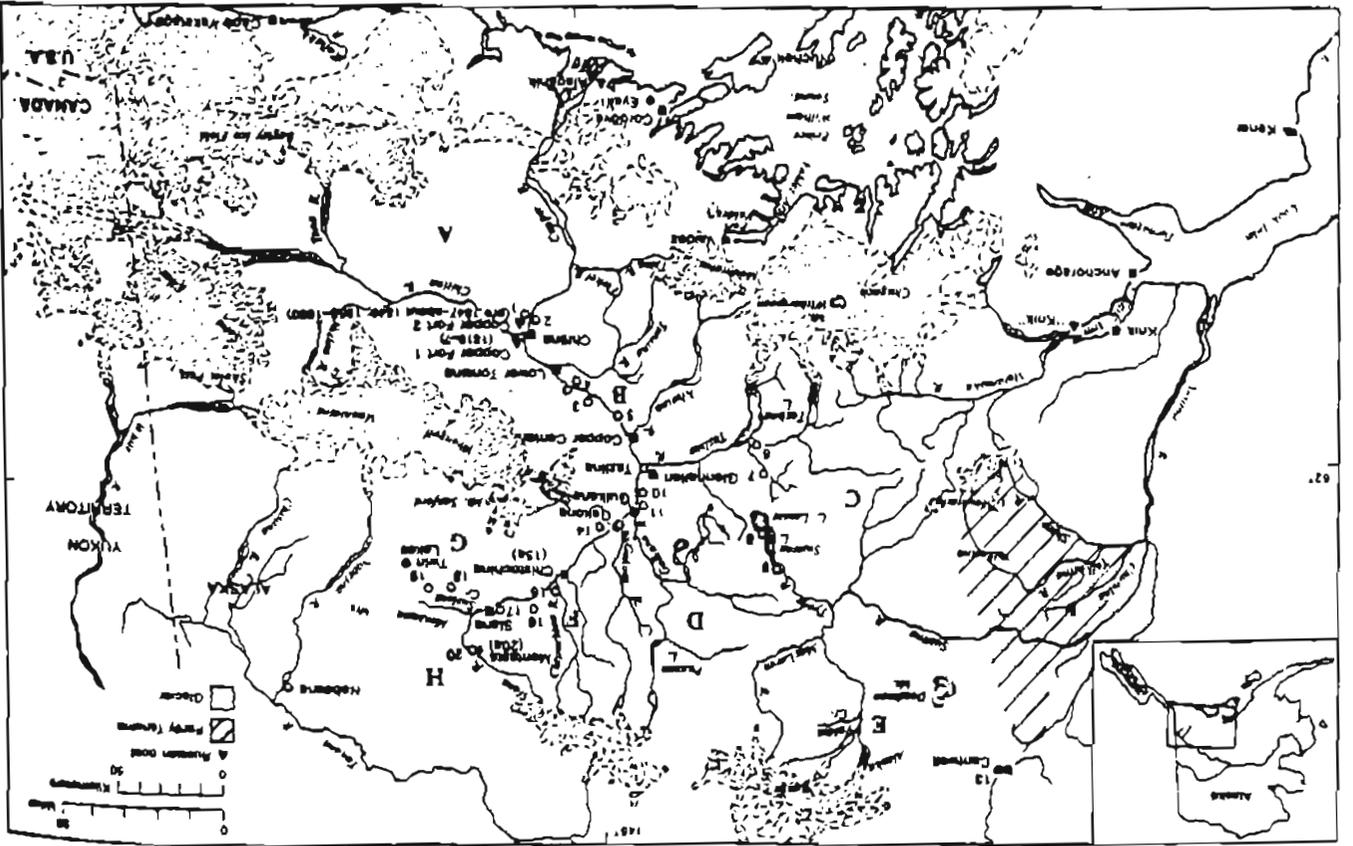
the Athna language belongs to the northern Athapaskan subfamily of the Na-Dene speech family. The Athna also occupy a distinct physiographic unit within the northern Athapaskan territory, the Copper River Basin (Van Stone 1974; de Laguna and McClellan 1981). Since the northern Athapaskan Indians do not have a formal tribal organization, the various groups of northern Athapaskans have been distinguished from one another on the basis of language differences and occupation of a common territory (Van Stone 1974, p. 4).

With population estimates ranging from 567 in 1818 to 250 in 1880 (Hanable 1982) the Ahtna were split into several territorily based, autonomous bands. Figure 1 is a map adapted from de Laguna and McClellan (1981, p. 642) showing the the major divisions of the Ahtna and their settlements. As can be seen on the map, the Tyone-Mendeltna band occupied the territory which includes Tazlina Lake. Their occupied villages were located at Mendeltna, at the mouth of the Mendeltna Creek, Matanuska Village on the east shore of Old Man Lake, a settlement at Lake Louise and one at Tyone Lake. De Laguna and McClellan report there were a few Ahtna individuals living at Mendeltna in 1975 but it was not a village settlement.

Each village was under a "chief". The village chief was either an important rich man who was the leading chief of the band's region; or the head of an extended household and subordinate to the regional chief. With the power of his position based in controlling economic activities, the chief "could command the labor of his dependents to hunt and fish; to build or repair houses, caribou and moose fences, fish weirs, and fishing platforms; and to construct and fill food caches" (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, p. 656). Additionally, he led

Figure 1

Fig. 1. Nineteenth-century bands with 19th and early 20th century villages (chiefs' quarters) and dates of occupation, when known. Lower AITNA A. Chitina-Tatal band: 1. Tatal (1847 or earlier-1911); 2. Dakah (1816-1838, completely abandoned by 1885). B. Tonsina-Kliutna band: 3. Copper Place (before 1885); 4. Liverstake or Lechistig's (chiefs' village of Lower Tonsina band after Tomsina-Kliutna band divided; inhabited 1885, beginning and end dates unknown); 5. Conaquana's or Sitckwan's (chiefs' village of Kliutna-Copper Center band after Tonsina-Kliutna band divided; inhabited before 1885-1907). C. Tyone-Mendelina band: 6. Mendelina, at mouth of Mendelina River (before 1848-?); 7. "Atanuska Village" (later Abercrombie 1900; map: inhabited 1898, beginning and end dates unknown); 8. Lake Louise (prehistoric and historic; 9. Tyone Lake (prehistoric and historic). D. Gulikana-Gakona band: 10. Dry Creek (?-1939); 11. Gulikana River (occupation dates unknown); 12. Gakona (may have been an Upper Athina village; ?-1935). E. Caritwell-Denali band (may not have existed in the 19th century); 13. Caritwell (1916-1970s). Upper AITNA F. Sanford River-Chistochina band: 14. Sanford River (later 1885?-1900?); 15. Mid Chistochina (later 1885-?); 16. Slana modern Chistochina (date first inhabited by Athinas unknown); 16. Indian River (?-1939). G. Slana-Batzulnetas band: 17. Slana (before 1819-1909); 18. Batzulnetas (before 1847-1940); 19. Sustora (before 1885-1948). H. Menastia band: 20. Old Menastia (?-1899); 20a. Modern Menastia (1951-1970s). The Russian post "Knik" is located according to Abercrombie (1900; map); the exact location and identification is uncertain.



trading parties and was "responsible for feeding his people, for delivering moral lectures, for enforcing the traditional 'law' within his own settlement, and for defending his people in legitimate grievances involving other groups" (de Laguna and McClellan 1981, p. 657).

The semi-nomadic Ahtna had two types of settlements: winter villages and hunting/fishing camps. Some camps were temporary while others were regularly occupied in season. The largest winter villages consisted of up to nine multifamily houses, while the smallest were only one multifamily house and a few huts. Dwellings associated with some villages were scattered along several miles, as is common today in the highway oriented Ahtna communities along the Richardson and Glenn Highways. Villages were smaller in population but more numerous than today.

The Ahtna constructed their large multifamily rectangular winter houses with vertically placed poles or planks and gable or hip roofs. They insulated the structures with moss and heavy spruce bark. Attached to the back of the house was a sweat bath. Smaller dwellings at the winter settlements and at trapping and hunting sites were constructed with horizontally laid split logs chinked with moss with a shed-type roof of turf and moss. The more temporary dwellings used in camps were of a double lean-to style with brush walls, bark roofs and sides held together with heavy poles. Structures consisting of tanned moose hides covering a dome shape framework of bent poles also provided temporary shelter for the Ahtna (de Laguna and McClellan 1981).

Each community had its own areas for hunting, fishing, and berry picking. The exploited area included a part of the Copper River or a major tributary and an area back from the river that included smaller streams, lakes of differing sizes, marshes, forests, open uplands and mountains (de Laguna and McClellan 1981).

The seasonal settlement pattern reflects the 19th century Ahtna subsistence cycle. In the spring and summer people lived in fish camps while they fished and dried salmon. Tazlina River, which flows into the Copper River is a major salmon spawning creek. Kaina and Mendeltna Creeks, which drain into Tazlina Lake, also are important salmon spawning creeks. Additionally, the beach along the north shore of the lake is a beach spawning area for salmon (Robinson 1983).

During summer, the Ahtna moved to upland camps where they hunted large and small game. The moose and caribou range throughout the Tazlina Lake area, with the moose concentrating in the lowlands in the winter. Moose fences, caribou fences, brush corrals, drag-pole snares and herding into lakes were techniques used in hunting. The great Yukon-Tanana caribou herd occasionally came down as far as Copper Center and was hunted by the Middle and Upper Ahtna. Caribou were not as easily exploited by the Lower Ahtna (de Laguna and McClellan 1981). Dall Sheep ranged on the slopes of the Wrangell Mountains and the Alaska Range accessible to all the Ahtna. Mountain goats in the Chugach Range were available to the Lower Ahtna. Black bear and grizzly were also found in the Copper River valley. Small game included porcupine, rabbit, muskrat and mountain squirrel.

As fall approached, the Ahtna descended to the rivers, trapping and hunting, gathering in the winter houses. Winter villages were

usually located near the caches of fish which had been stored during the summer salmon run. The Athna also harvested fish other than salmon. Whitefish, lake trout, ling cod, a type of herring and grayling were also available in the lakes and streams (Irving 1957). The Ahtna hunted ducks and geese, which are found in a medium density in the Tazlina Lake area, with pole-snares before guns were available. Other fowl available to them included ptarmigan and spruce hen. They gathered roots, berries, the inner bark of the poplar tree and greens storing them in cache pits for later use.

In late January and February, if the food caches were getting low, the population scattered again to hunt and fish. Fresh water fish and small game such as rabbits and porcupine were often the main source of food in late winter and early spring. The Ahtna often faced starvation in late spring and early summer, just before the first salmon run. This became a particularly serious problem in the late 19th and early 20th century after the game became seriously depleted due to over hunting resulting from supplying mining camps and new settlements with meat.

Fur trading activities also tended to scatter the population in the winter. Furbearing animals trapped included lynx, wolverine, marten, fox, beaver and land otter. The Lower Ahtna did little trapping themselves, but acted as middlemen between the Upper Ahtna and the Euro-American traders, taking the furs to the trading posts in the spring and winter (de Laguna and McClellan 1981). The aboriginal trail between Cook Inlet and Copper River which passed through Tazlina Lake and other trails linked the Ahtna to a widespread trading network which connected them to other Athapaskans, Eskimo, coastal Eyak,

Tlingit, and indirectly the Chukchi of Siberia. Figure 2 is a photograph taken in 1905 of Indians from Tazlina Lake on the trail between Cook Inlet and Tazlina Lake.

During the 1920s there was a change in the winter settlement pattern of the Ahtna (Reckford 1979). More intensive trapping, stimulated by high fur prices, had an effect on the settlement pattern of the Ahtna. Instead of gathering together in the winter villages, small family groups spent much of the winter living along traplines. Consequently, the number of ceremonies which were traditionally held during each winter when people were gathered together declined; many were ignored. The Ahtna were able to obtain more trade goods than ever before because of the cash or credit which they realized from the fur trade market. Potlatching was less frequent. Also, the population was drastically reduced from a flu epidemic.

The 1919 Spanish influenza epidemic hit the Ahtna particularly hard; half the Ahtna living in the Copper River region died (Reckford 1979). People living in the more isolated areas suffered a higher death rate because of their distance from medical help which was available in the larger communities. The outlying survivors moved to larger villages such as Copper Center, abandoning many of the remaining small traditional villages in the north and near Tazlina Lake (Reckford 1979, p. 44).

In the early 1900s an Ahtna family lived on the lake at the mouth of Mendeltna Creek according to a member of that family still living in the Glennallen area. When she was a young girl a flu epidemic killed most of the members of the family; the survivors relocated at Tazlina, a settlement on the Richardson Highway. Members of this

Picture of Tazlina Lake Indians on the trail between Cook Inlet  
and Tazlina Lake. Photo taken in 1905

Photo ordered from National Archives

Figure 2

extended family did not occupy this Mendeltna site again because of the sickness and death associated with it, but they did return to Tazlina Lake to hunt and fish. Members of the family are reported to be buried in several burial sites along or near Mendeltna Creek (Secondchief 1983).

In the 1920s members of the same family fished for salmon at Kaina Creek on the south side of Tazlina Lake. They lived on the shore of the lake and had a fishing site up the creek about a mile or two where the drying racks were located. A section of the shoreline at the mouth of Kaina Creek reported sank into the lake after the 1964 earthquake and an old cabin along with it (Houston 1983). After the fishing season, the family went by boat to the glacier end of Lake Tazlina where they hunted moose. In the winter members of the family lived at the Richardson Highway community of Tazlina.

#### Administration of Alaska, 1867-1912

At the time of the transfer of Alaska to the United States by Russia in October 1867, the army became responsible for the vast new territory. By not creating a civil government in Alaska after the purchase, Alaska became an anomaly. The existing laws did not give the military authority to govern the territory as it was not a conquered land. However, they had de facto authority over the civilian population.

In July 1868, Congress organized the entire district of Alaska into a customs collection district and established the first civil office, the office of the collector of customs. Congress extended the laws relating to customs, commerce, and navigation to Alaska. At the same time, it prohibited the importation and sale of firearms,

ammunition and distilled spirits. Judicial jurisdiction fell under the U.S. district courts in the Territory of Washington. Congress's inaction and the exclusion of Alaska from most general laws of the United States resulted in little development occurring in Alaska during the early territorial period.

Three companies of troops, stationed at Fort Tongass, Fort Wrangell, Sitka, Fort Kenai and Kodiak, made up the early military presence in Alaska. Commanded by General Jeff C. Davis, they were placed under the military Department of Columbia, headquartered at Vancouver Barricks, Washington. Because it is an interior area accessible only via the Copper River up which navigation is difficult and dangerous, the Copper River valley was not of primary interest to the military. Consequently, the Copper River Athapaskans infrequently interacted with the Americans.

The army remained in control until 1877, when orders came to withdraw from Alaska. The feared native uprising or challenging of the U.S. presence and authority in Alaska never materialized. When the army left, the Treasury Department, represented by the collector of customs and the revenue marine cutter were the sole representatives of governmental authority in Alaska. The Copper River valley continued to receive little attention.

A threatened takeover of the white settlement in Sitka by the local natives resulted in the Navy Department being given administrative responsibility for Alaska in 1879. The Navy did not explore the interior during this time but concentrated on the coastal areas. Therefore, when the civil government was established by Congress in 1884, little was known about the interior.

Until 1884, when Congress passed the "organic act", "an act providing a civil government for Alaska", there was no civil government, courts or means of acquisition or transfer of titles to property (RGA 1900:7). The organic act established a civil government consisting of a governor, one U.S. district court judge, one U.S. district attorney, one collector of customs and four U.S. commissioners, located at Sitka, Juneau, Ft. Wrangell and Unalaska, all of whom were appointed by the President. Assisting the appointees were eight deputy marshals, five deputy collectors of customs, clerks, justices of the peace, notaries public, constables and native policemen. The entire Alaskan territory became a single land district with a commissioner, clerk and marshal to be the land officers ex-officio. A revenue cutter and a navy ship plied the waters of Alaska, providing further U.S. presence in Alaska. Dependent on the Navy for transportation and without its own ship at its disposal or command the movement of the government officials was severely restricted. Consequently, the governor and other civil servants did little traveling around Alaska, especially beyond the southeast area. Absent from the government established in Alaska was a delegate to Congress representing Alaska, local legislative powers, and an equal status with the other U.S. Territories.

The laws applicable to Alaska came from the State of Oregon and a few selected general U.S. laws. The organic act put into effect the general laws of the State of Oregon "so far as the same may be applicable". The general mining laws of the United States were adopted, which had the effect of encouraging mining development. However, the general land laws were specifically excluded and did not

apply to Alaska. This exclusion frustrated land and business development for many years, resulting in little land passing from public to private ownership.

For the next 28 years, until 1912, when Congress created a territorial government with legislative powers, there was a general increase in governmental presence in Alaska, which included gradual increases in the size of the government, number of courts, and an extension of more general U.S. laws to Alaska. As people began to settle in Alaska and communities gained permanence, Congress responded with several laws governing the establishment, authority and responsibilities of municipal corporations.

A 1898 law "an act extending the homestead laws and providing for right-of-way for railroads in the district of Alaska, and for other purposes" extended the U.S. homestead laws to Alaska, with restrictions which limited the area to 80 acres instead of the usual 160 acres, and opened the way for railroad construction across public lands. It provided that alternate 80 acres along navigable waters be reserved as public lands. Because the land in Alaska was not surveyed, the law was inoperable except for the soldiers who had extended rights and were able to enter unsurveyed lands for homesteading. However, the costs and delays incurred by the homesteading soldier deterred many from gaining patent to homestead land. They had to pay for the survey, have it approved, and then pay a fee for the land. Governor Brady (1899, p. 37) reported to the Secretary of Interior in his 1899 Report of the Governor of Alaska:

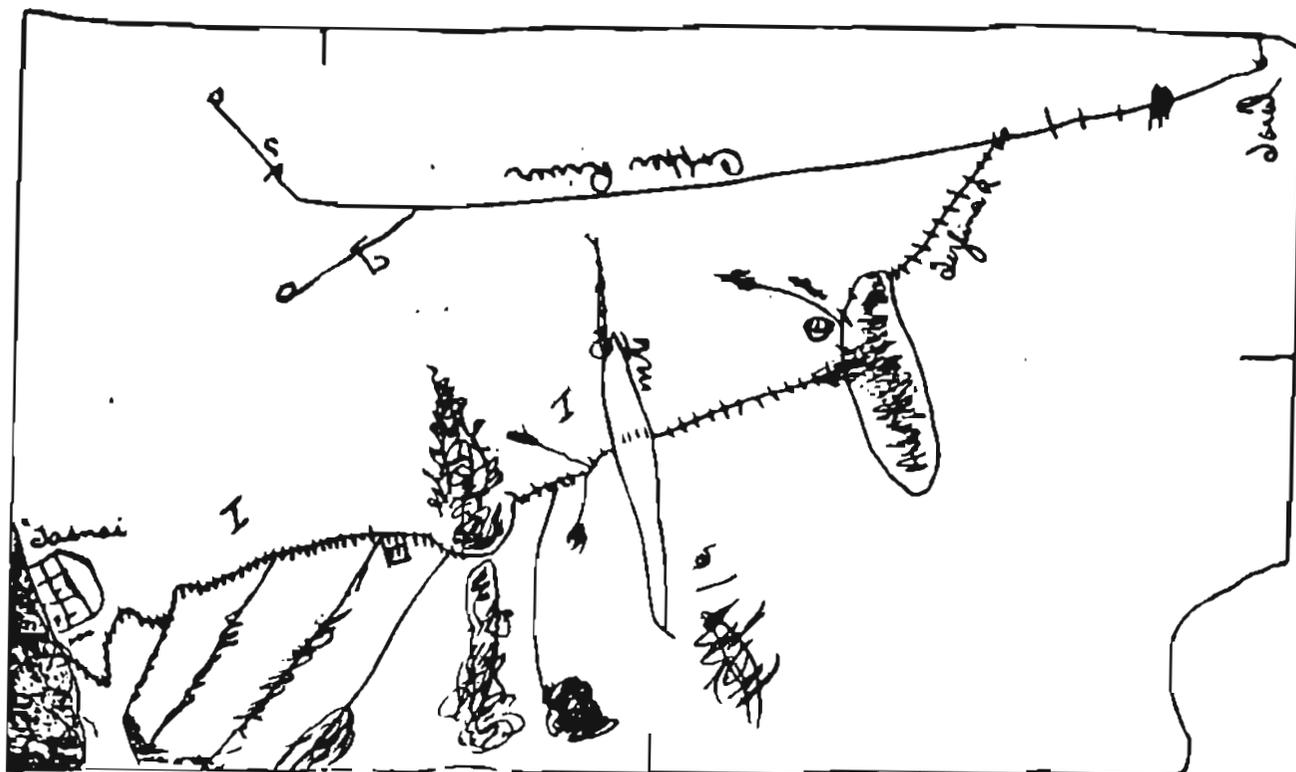
The provisions in the ... law allowing settlers upon unsurveyed lands to acquire title by means of soldiers' additional homestead rights can be taken advantage of only by those who are willing to

pay dearly for them. This scrip comes anywhere from \$10 to \$30 per acre and before anyone can make an entry he must have it surveyed by a United States deputy surveyor at his own expense. This work must be approved by the surveyor-general, and when so approved he can go with his plat, field notes, and scrip and make his entry before the register and receiver. Nothing has retarded and is retarding the real growth of Alaska so much as the prohibition in the organic act in not allowing the extension of the general land laws of the United States to Alaska.

An act in 1900 extended the U.S. coal-land laws to Alaska. But again, because the lands were not surveyed, it had little effect in opening up development on coal lands.

Amendments to the 1898 homestead laws in 1903 extended the homestead size to 160 acres, bringing it into line with the size of homestead entries applicable to other parts of the U.S., with provisions for homesteads to be staked on unsurveyed lands. There was no homesteading activity around Tazlina Lake during this period. Interest in land was further south, closer to Copper Center.

The United States Government sent expeditions to Alaska on rescue missions and to gather geographic, geological, social and other scientific information. Expedition reports by Allen (1900) and later by Abercombie (1900), Glenn (1900), Mendenhall (1900), Rafferty (1900), Schrader (1900), and others provide some of the few written records of this time for this area. The information and maps on Alaska available to these explorers, based primarily on Dall's (1870) reports, Russian-American Company records, and information from adventurers, prospectors and traders was scarce, incomplete and often inaccurate. The maps in Figures 3, 4 and 5, published in 1898 federal government reports illustrate the incompleteness of their geographical data on Tazlina Lake. Because attention was directed toward reaching



NATIVE MAP OF THE ROUTE TO COOK INLET VIA THE SUCHITNO RIVER.

- Figure 3

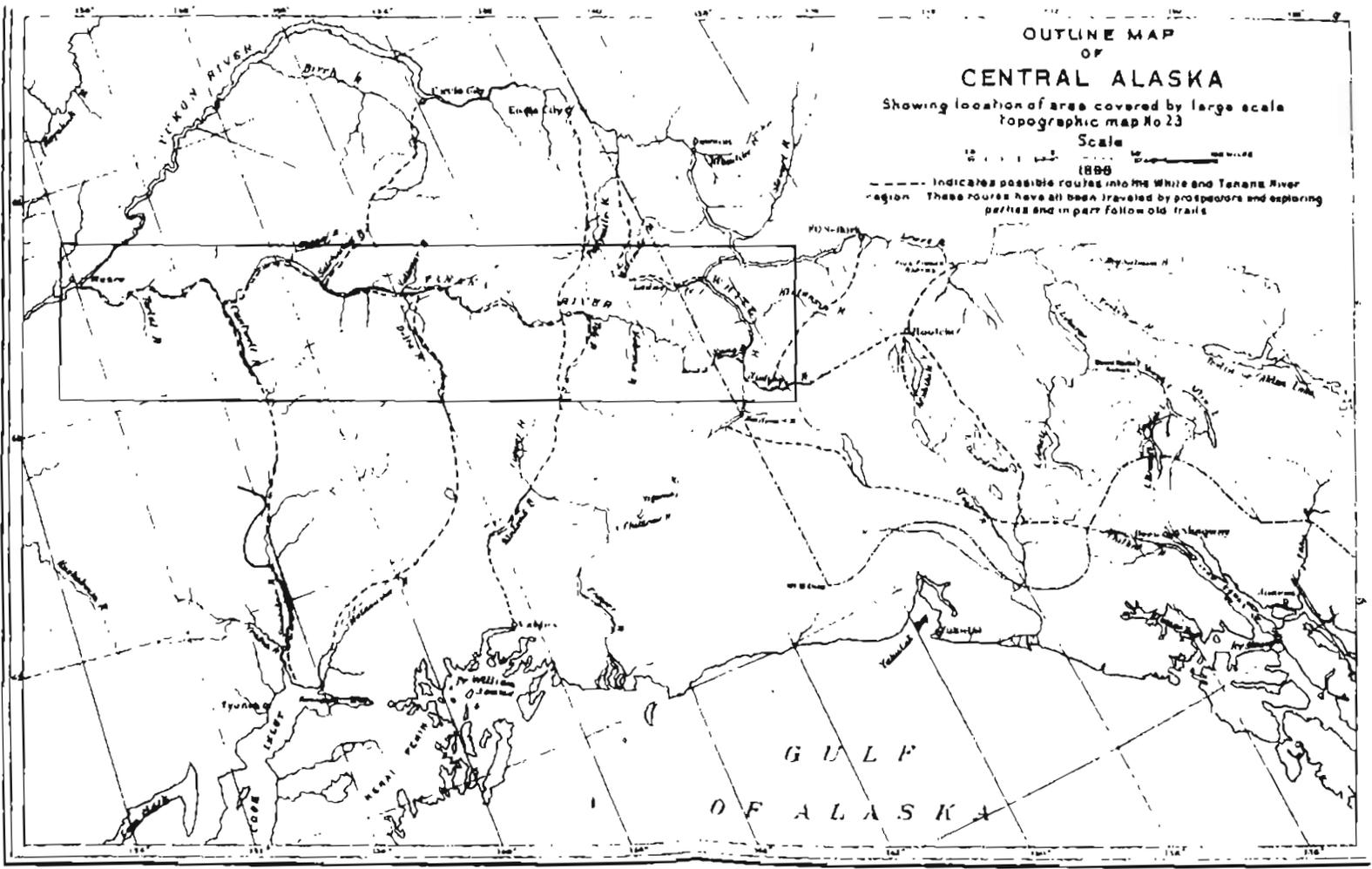


Figure 4

# ALASKA

## ROUTE OF MILITARY EXPEDITION

IN CHARGE OF

CAPTAIN E. F. GLENN, U.S.A.

## FROM RESURRECTION BAY TO THE TANANA RIVER

1898

TOPOGRAPHY BY W. C. MENDENHALL, ASSISTANT GEOLOGIST, U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Scale



Contours interval 200, 500, and 1000 feet  
Dashed line mean sea level      Dotted line river to camp  
..... Probable drainage, not surveyed

63

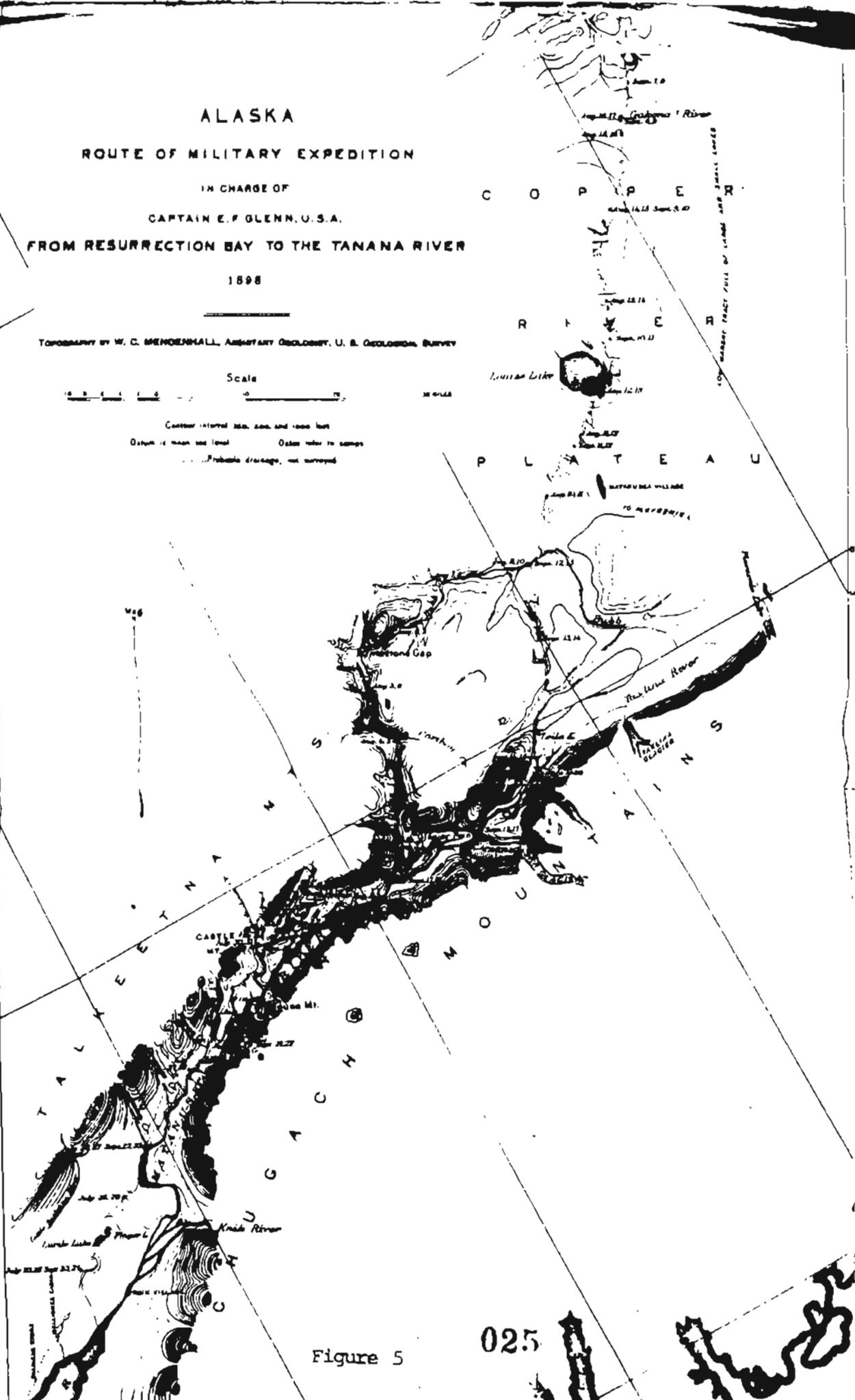


Figure 5

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the Yukon River, the army expeditions travelling from the Cook Inlet along the aboriginal trail up the Matanuska River to the interior continued north past the cutoff to the Copper River via Tazlina Lake, to the Tanana River. The other trail into the interior the army investigated, the Valdez-Klutina Trail over the Valdez glacier, also by-passed Tazlina Lake.

The government operated an agricultural experiment station at Copper Center from 1902-1908. Hampered by early frosts, three out of six grains experimented with grew to maturity. For the private sector, there was a market for vegetables and hay in settlements and mining camps. The area most promising for farming in the Copper River valley is south of Tazlina, near Tonsina and Kenny Lakes.

In 1900, independent of the military trail work, WAMCATS (Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System) began constructing a communications system (Mitchell 1982). It was to provide a communication link between the gold fields and military posts in Alaska with the rest of the world. The WAMCATS line was used by some as a trail. Soldiers responsible for maintenance of the cable line were stationed in log cabins every 40 miles along the line. In 1910 the wireless began to replace the cable line, which was gradually phased out.

In 1900 the military began work in Valdez on a trail from Valdez to Ft. Egbert, an active gold rush area and a military outpost. Established in 1905 as part of the Department of War, the Board of Road Commissioners, consisting of three military engineering officers, was empowered to construct and maintain roads and trails in Alaska and took over the construction of the Valdez trail. The 1902 discovery of

gold in the Fairbanks by Pedro Felix started a stampede and drew people away from other areas of Alaska. By 1905, Fairbanks had topped all other Alaskan areas in gold production, shifting attention away from the Ft. Egbert area (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 1977). As a consequence, when the military trail reached Gulkana it was diverted to Fairbanks. About every 10 miles along the trail, a days travel, watering stations served the people and horses travelling this route. This trail later became the Richardson Highway. Along this trail is the village of Tazlina located near the confluence of the Tazlina River with the the Copper River. A traditional seasonally used Indian fishing camp, a permanent village was established by 1900 (Selkregg 1977). Stimulated by the placer gold deposits around Fairbanks and the construction of the military telegraph line, the winter trail was gradually upgraded to a wagon road. Later it was improved to accommodate automobiles and finally it became a paved highway (Naske 1980). Figure 6 is a picture taken around 1905 of the military trail under construcion.

#### Gold Rush Era

Although gold was discovered in Alaska and British Columbia in the 1860s, the first major gold strike was in 1880 near Juneau. Throughout the gold rush era, which lasted until the beginning of World War I, actual or rumored major gold strikes were followed by "stampedes" of prospectors hoping to make their own big strike. Usually more discoveries were made following the rush. Boom towns of one season were often deserted the next season with news of big discoveries in another area.



Figure 6

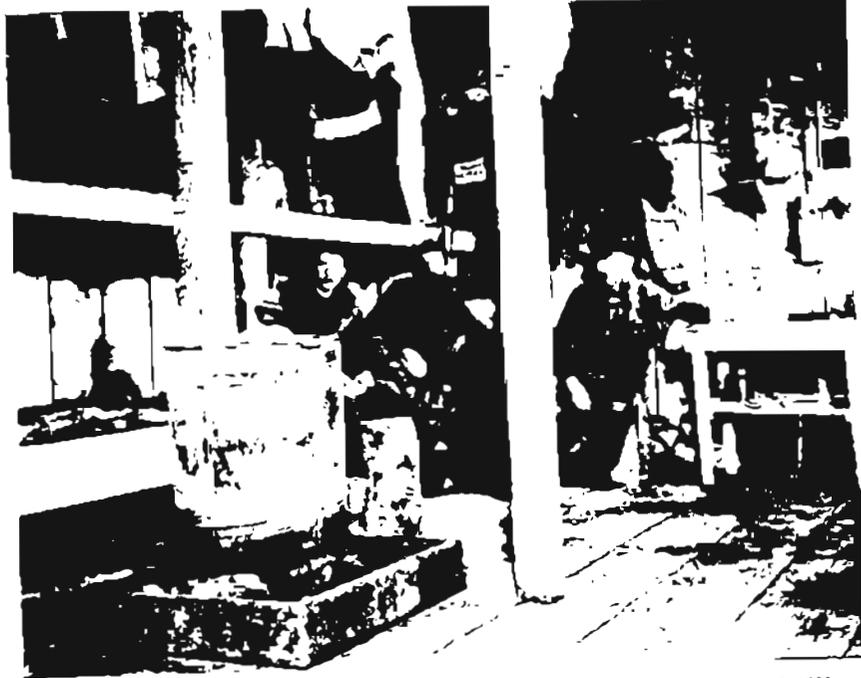
Records of early recorded mining claims show prospecting activity in the Copper River drainage in 1880. There are 15 recorded mining claims dating from 1880-1882 within 25 miles of Tazlina on the north and west side. The closest claim to the lake was staked and recorded in 1880 near the Tazlina Glacier on Klanelneechera Creek which flows on the north and west side of Tazlina Glacier into the lake. Other claims in this group were staked on Bottley Creek, Barnette Creek, Nelchina River, Little Nelchina River, Sunshine, Cash Creek and Slide Mountain. No big strikes resulted.

In 1886, Howard Franklin discovered gold on a tributary of the Fortymile River, the first discovery of gold in the United States portion of the Yukon River. A rush followed and more discoveries were made. In the early 1890s the discovery of gold near Valdez was not followed by a rush but attracted local interest only. In 1896 one of the largest placer gold strikes in history, on a tributary of Klondike River in the Yukon Territory, started a stampede to the Klondike, attracting thousands of people and emptying former boom towns. By the winter of 1898 there were an estimated 30,000 people in the Yukon region, 13,000 of them in the Klondike area.

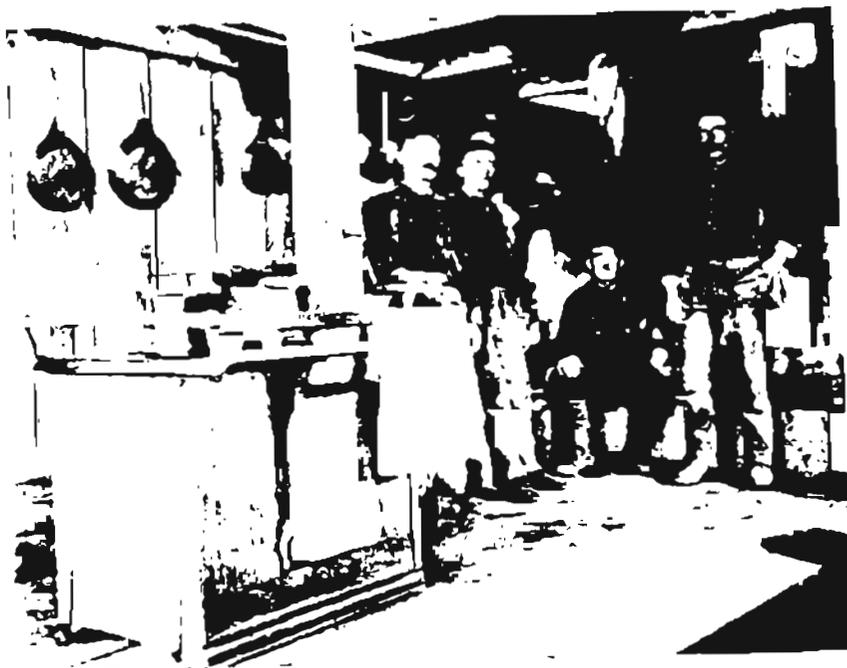
New interest in the Yukon in 1898 brought attention and people to the Copper River region. A Canadian tax on travellers through its territory prompted many to seek out an all-American route to the Yukon to avoid the tax. An estimated 3,000 to 4,000 people disembarked in Valdez which was founded in 1897. They travelled the Valdez-Klutina trail over the Valdez Glacier and down the trail out of the snowfields to Klutina Lake and then down the trail along the Klutina River to the Copper River where Copper Center is located (Castner 1900; Remington

1939; Schrader 1900; Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 1977). During the same time, several hundred stampedeers landed at Orca and attempted to ascend the Copper River from the mouth, with only a few making it as far as Taral and Chitina because of the difficulty in navigating the river (Schrader 1900). Having reached the Copper River, those wanting to go on to the Yukon could then turn north and travel along an old Indian route which went up the Tazlina River to Tazlina Lake, then north to Lake Louise and through the Mentasna pass to the Tanana River, which flows into the Yukon River. Many of the prospectors following the all-American route over the Valdez Glacier to the Yukon in 1898-99 did not push on the Yukon but stayed in the Copper River basin and prospected there, staking claims throughout the area. The many prospectors who remained that first winter at Klutina and Copper Center faced hard times, many facing starvation dying of scurvy (Abercrombie 1900; Schrader 1900; Remington 1939; Reckford 1983). The photographs in Figure 7 of the scurvy hospital in Valdez were published in Abercrombie's Copper River Exploring Expedition, 1899.

There are no recorded claims on the Tazlina Lake or Tazlina River during the early 20th century. However, Paul Barnette, a prospector and trapper is said to have lived on Tazlina Lake during that time. He had a cabin on the northwest side of the lake near the glacier in the vicinity of the Klanelneechena Creek. Remains of the cabin are reported still standing. A 1898 map prepared by Department of Interior which accompanied the Report of the Governor of Alaska in 1902, illustrating areas of gold discoveries included the Tazlina River from the outlet of Tazlina Lake, although there are no recorded claims dating to that time in the marked area.



11.—INTERIOR OF SCURVY HOSPITAL FOR DESTITUTE MINERS AT VALDEZ. MAY 9, 1899.



12.—INTERIOR OF HOSPITAL KITCHEN FOR DESTITUTE MINERS AT VALDEZ. MAY 9, 1899.

Figure 7

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By the winter of 1899, many settlements and trading posts were established along the Copper River. Schrader (1900) reports that in August, 1898, a population of 500 to 600 people lived at Copper Center in tents and few logs cabins, with many people busy felling trees for building cabins in which to winter over. A store, post office and hotel, housed in tents were present in Copper Center. The two photographs in Figure 8 were taken in Copper Center in 1899.

In 1899 and 1900 copper was discovered and claims were staked along the Upper Chitina and McCarthy Creek area near the Kennicott Glacier, claims which would later become part of the Kennecott Mines. This area is to the south and east of Tazlina Lake, on the opposite side of the Copper River in the Wrangell Mountains.

The Guggenheim and Morgan families formed a partnership, popularly referred to as the Alaska Syndicate, and bought stock in Stephen Birch's Alaska Copper and Coal Company, which had bought up and consolidated a number of copper claims in the McCarthy area. After two false starts, one in Valdez and the other in Katalla, the Alaska Syndicate constructed a railroad from Cordova up the Copper River and the Chitina Valley to the Kennecott Mines. Completed in 1911, the Copper River and Northwest Railroad continued operation until the mine closed, after exhausting the ore deposits, in 1938. Because the railroad and the shipping facilities which transported the copper to the smelter in Washington and the mines were all property of the Alaska Syndicate, a virtual monopoly existed in the copper industry in Alaska.

1920s to Present



*May Meeting - Copper Center - 1898.*

Figure 8

In the 1920s few employment opportunities other than trapping and an occasional construction job were available. Many miners had left by that time. Many were drawn off by World War I and others left because hydraulic mining techniques eliminated the need for large numbers of laborers to work the mines. With fewer miners, there was less demand for fresh meat which the Ahtna hunted and sold to non-natives in the region. The Kennecott mines were fairly self-contained and had little impact on development in other areas of the Copper River.

Because the 1920s were a time of high fur prices, trapping was an important economic activity in the Copper River drainage for both natives and whites. Because of the increase in cash in the local economy, there was a greater dependence on store bought food and a drop in hunting for subsistence purposes.

When the bottom fell out of the fur market during the Depression, many people stopped trapping and moved to the larger, highway oriented communities. However, other small groups settled more or less permanently at Tazlina Lake, Klutina Lake and other trapping outposts (Reckford 1979). These outlying settlements reflect a shift back to increased subsistence use of the resources than had been common during the 1920s, when there was an increased dependence on store bought food. Although furs brought little money, some people continued to trap because they had few skills for other kinds of work.

Through interviews with local residents, general locations were made on a 1:63 360 scale topographic map of trapper/pro prospector cabins built and used between the 1920s and 1950s. Some cabins were used by several different people over the years. Hunting guides have also used

cabins on the lake during hunting season for their personal use or as part of their business as a staging area for hunting party. Site locations on Figure 9 are termed approximate because locations were not verified with a field survey. See Bittner's (1984) report to the Tazlina Lake Project file for notes on the specific cabin sites.

According to the local fish and game biologists, most trappers today are "highway" trappers who live along the highway and run trap lines from places which are accessible by road, which Tazlina Lake is not. To trap the area effectively requires setting up a camp or residence in the area. Because of its distance from the road system, the lake area does not lend itself to highway trapping.

The Copper River valley was a transportation link to areas of economic development in the interior and until the Alaska Railroad was completed in 1922, the Richardson Highway was the primary means of travel into the interior. Most traffic passed through the area to destination points outside the Copper River valley, stimulating little development other than a few roadhouses along the Richardson Highway. When, by 1918, the road was upgraded to accommodate automobiles, roadhouses in operation became more spread out because the distance of a day's travel increased. The roadhouses served travellers and functioned as trading posts for the natives. After it took over the Alaska Road Commission, the Interior Department levied a \$9.00 per ton toll on all freight trucked over the Richardson Highway. This action hampered the development of the truck freight business along the Richardson Highway. The toll was established to encourage use of the new Alaska Railroad and was not lifted until the beginning of World War II.



During the 1940s the Copper River region experienced another boom. With the federally funded work beginning in the spring of 1941, construction of the Glenn Highway and an airfield at Gulkana provided employment to the residents. The new construction also brought in many new people. This activity stimulated development and settlement along the established travel routes. These highway oriented commercial and residential developments by-passed Tazlina Lake, which was set back several miles from the main roads. Completion of the Glenn Highway to Anchorage shifted the orientation of the region to Anchorage, and away from Valdez, Cordova and Fairbanks.

With increased employment opportunities, families living along the traplines away from the highway began to move back to the larger communities. The federal government began pressuring the Ahtna to send their children to school which meant they would not be able to live in the more isolated areas where they hunted and trapped.

Federal land programs (BLM 1950) opened up land in the central Copper River basin which could also be obtained for trading and manufacture, home and cabin sites, and recreation as set out in Public Law 275, approved by the 81st Congress in 1949. Up to 160 acres could be homesteaded for agricultural use. A 1950 federal study considered dairy production feasible in the Tonsina and Kenney Lake areas if it had a large amount of feed for the winter. Land was also made available in the vicinity of Glennallen. It generally was classified for disposal in 5 acre tracts under the Small Tract Act. People were required to construct improvements on the property and pay the appraised price of the tract. Most land parcels staked were located along the highways. Two five acre parcels of private land located on

the lake, one on Mendeltna Creek near its mouth by the lake (conveyed to Byron A. Anderson in 1978) and one at the glacier end of the lake (conveyed to Peter D. Robinson in 1981) were secured under this federal program.

In 1957 the federal government classified some of the area around the lake as prospectively valuable for oil and gas. However, there has not been any oil or gas development in the Copper River basin.

In the 1970s the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline stimulated activity in the area, attracting many people, again with a highway orientation (Reckford 1979). Ahtna Incorporated, one of the smallest regional native corporations, constructed a motel in Glennallen and an office complex in Copper Center. Ahtna Incorporated has filed claims for historic places and cemetery sites under provisions of Section 14(h)(1) of ANCSA on three sites around Tazlina Lake.

Current recreational use in the summer includes float trips and kayaking, hunting and fishing. The book Wild Rivers of Alaska (Weber 1976) includes the Tazlina River as a fast white-water trip for experienced paddlers. Access to the river is via the Nelchina River to Tazlina Lake and then down Tazlina River to the Copper River. Three to four miles across along most of its length, the lake is described as a potentially "mean" lake by modern users well acquainted with it. Winds come down off Tazlina Glacier creating rough, dangerous water conditions on the lake. Hunters use the cabins on the lake as staging areas for hunting moose, caribou and bear. In the winter, snowmobilers and cross-country skiers can travel from the Glenn Highway to the lake area. The owners of Kamping Resorts of

Alaska Lodge located on the Glenn Highway at Mendeltna Creek are reported to have cleared a trail to the lake for recreational use in the winter. The trail follows an old trail from Tazlina Lake to Old Man Lake (Atkins 1983).

#### Conclusion

Tazlina Lake lies within the area occupied in historic times by northern Athapaskan Indian people belonging to the Athna tribal group. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Tyone-Mendeltna band of Ahtna lived in the area, using the lake seasonally. A member of one of the Indian families who used the lake in the early 20th century still resides near the area in a home on the Glenn Highway.

The lake is located within the region of Ahtna Incorporated, one of the thirteen regional native corporations established by ANCSA. Title for the land selected by the native corporation around the lake as 14(h)(1) historical places and cemetery sites under the provisions of ANCSA and title for land also selected by the state, has not yet been conveyed by the Department of Interior. Historical and archaeological research indicate native use of sites located around the mouths of the Mendeltna and Kaina Creeks.

An important aboriginal trail passes through the east end Tazlina Lake. It connected the Copper River to Cook Inlet. Also, one could travel north and then east from the lake and access a trail passing through the Mentasta Pass, and on to the Tanana River. A network of trails linked the Copper River drainage to native groups in other regions of the state.

The Russians were interested in the trail as a transportation route to the interior for fur trading. However, the Russians found

the Ahtna hostile and a poor potential market and therefore pulled out of the area.

The early military and civilian administrators in Alaska did not show an interest in the Copper River drainage in general nor the Tazlina Lake in particular. The transportation corridors established by federal trail and road projects by-passed Tazlina Lake. During the gold rush attention focused on the Yukon. Tazlina Lake was often by-passed by prospectors and explorers who could travel up the Copper River valley and reach a trail going through the Mentasta Pass without having to travel via the trail which passed through the east end of Tazlina Lake. There are prospector/trapper cabins on the north and south shores of the lake, some dating back to the early 20th century.

Tazlina lies in within a mineralized area, but no significant development has occurred. The Kennecott Copper mines to the east and south in the Chitina and McCarthy valleys in the Wrangell Mountains were too far away and self-contained to directly impact the Tazlina Lake area.

First the Ahtna and later the whites who settled in the area have used Tazlina Lake seasonally for hunting, fishing and trapping, and recreation. This continues to be the primary use today. The low population and the minimal development in the Copper River valley and lack of road access has kept impact and use of the lake down.

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