

The Gravel Magnet: Some Social Impacts of the Alaska Highway on Yukon Indians

JULIE CRUIKSHANK*

Popular accounts of Alaska Highway construction emphasize heroic themes: "man against the wilderness," "North American defence," "triumph technology," "bringing civilization north," and so on. They stress the speed with which the road was built and the overall efficiency of the operation in the face of wartime constraints. More serious investigation, on the other hand, indicates that building the highway was a process which began before 1942 and continued after the road was in place. Scholars have begun to consider construction in a variety of contexts: military, political, industrial and social.

One context worth examining is that of the social impact of the Alaska Highway on Yukon Indians, through whose territory the road passed. In a preliminary attempt to evaluate that impact, this paper begins by outlining some aspects of the native economy and society before the construction of the road. Secondly, events surrounding the construction in the southern Yukon are summarized, followed by a discussion of short-term long-term term effects of the highway on Indian people living close to the route. Such effects include changes in the annual cycle, settlement patterns, sources of subsistence and cash income, social organization, values, education, health conditions and alcohol use. The analysis is based on church, government and military records available in the Yukon archives, and also draws on oral accounts I have recorded since 1974. In these accounts, people rarely single out the construction as an event; rather they mention the highway in passing in discussions of how life has changed during the twentieth century.

Ethnographers have repeatedly documented the ability of Athapaskan Indians to adapt to the changing conditions of life, and nowhere is this clearer than in the southern Yukon. Native people living there were aboriginal hunters and fishermen who developed technology, social customs and a subsistence lifestyle admirably suited to a subarctic environment. Since resources varied cyclically, families migrated over large areas of land in the course of a year to obtain food, clothing and shelter. They fished for and dried salmon in summer, hunted game animals and dried the meat in fall, stayed relatively immobile in winter to conserve energy, and began trapping and fishing again in spring. Because animal migration patterns might change, the Indians were always prepared to modify their movements when necessary.

Social organization was also flexible, though structured by the matrilineal descent groups (moieties), Wolf and Crow, which were sometimes further subdivided into "sibs" or clans. It was fundamental Indian law that a Crow person must marry a Wolf and vice versa; marriage within one's own moiety was treated as incest. Such marriage rules reinforced alliances between kin groups, guiding proper behaviour at birth, puberty, death, and other occasions.

Division of labour reflected age, sex, and kinship. Generally men provided and women prepared the food, clothing, and shelter within the domestic household, although each was capable of performing the other's roles when necessary. A man was responsible for supporting his wife's parents until their deaths. Old people were well cared for and were respected for their knowledge and experience, which they were expected to pass on to the young. Children were encouraged to take responsibility early in life and to work with and learn from adults.

Political leadership was not institutionalized apart from kinship. A "chief" was the ranking male representative of his lineage, and his influence depended on his abilities to acquire and manipulate wealth. He did not exercise absolute power but earned respect on an ongoing basis.

A rich mythology stressed the need for harmony with all beings in the natural world, particularly respect for animal species on which life depended. Irresponsible hunting and trapping were deplored.

Native people in the north have long adjusted not only to changes in wildlife cycles but also to changes in human history. Trade between coastal Tlingit Indians and interior Athapaskans began at least two centuries ago. The Tlingit imported trade goods from European traders on the coast and exported valuable furs. Some Tlingit moved inland to be closer to the source of furs, and they brought their language, social customs, clans and crests with them and blended into the local culture.

More dramatic change came with the Klondike gold rush of 1896-98. More than thirty thousand immigrants arrived within a few years. Some Indians along the way became involved in packing, guiding, and providing food for prospectors; a few years later others were deck hands on riverboat*, The Tagish who were involved in the initial gold discovery, and the Han at the mouth of the Klondike were most directly affected. Most other Yukon natives were observers of rather than participants in the rush. The greatest effects for them included the breaking of the Tlingit fur trade monopoly; the impact of forest fires on wildlife along the Yukon River; the arrival of independent white traders; the expansion of missionary activity; the building of the White Pass and Yukon Route railway from Skagway to Whitehorse; and the running of a riverboat fleet between Whitehorse and Dawson. Some early trading post sites later became villages along the Alaska Highway.

Most whites left the country soon after the beginning of the century. In 1900, the total population of the Yukon Territory had climbed to over 27,000, of whom 3,000 were Indians. By 1912, it had declined to 6,000 Indians and whites and by 1921 to just over 4,000. The population remained relatively stable for the next twenty years: 4,230 in 1931 and 4,914 in 1941.

Fur prices remained high well into the 1930's. By then, a family's annual cycle included one or more trips to a trading post, and some families built I cabins near posts to use when they visited. There was some seasonal wage work on riverboats, at wood camps, with game guides, and on the White Pass railroad. More children were attending residential schools. Yet basic organization and coherence of the traditional lifestyle remained.

Before the Second World War, there were no major roads and almost no mechanized vehicles in the Yukon. A few wagon trails remained from the flurries of mining activity near Kluane Lake and Carcross in the early 1900's. A winter road paralleled the Yukon River from Whitehorse to Dawson City. The White Pass railroad brought freight from the coast to Whitehorse and carried out gold and other ore brought upstream from Dawson and Mayo. Generally, however, people travelled by foot, dog team or boat, and were separated from each other by several days of travel.

Then in April 1942, three regiments of American soldiers arrived Whitehorse with orders to build the Yukon section of the Alaska Highway. Between April 1942 and December 1943, more than 34,000 men were employed, constructing the road through British Columbia, the Yukon, Alaska. Once again, native people were overwhelmed by large numbers outsiders with radically different lifestyles.

The second "rush," as older people call it, marked the beginning of another new era. Its consequences were substantially more disruptive than those of the first rush, testing native adaptability to the limits, often at great personal cost. Although the Alaska Highway was not the only factor involved in altering old ways, its construction and use can be seen as a central thread in changes which began to take place after 1942.

Discussions between the governments of Canada and the United States about a Yukon-Alaska-Pacific Highway began as early as 1929. In 1931, a joint United States-Canadian committee was set up to consider such a project. On 29 December 1938, Prime Minister Mackenzie King announced the appointment of a five member Canadian commission which was to parallel a commission already appointed by Roosevelt. Although the commission held hearings to secure first hand data about the feasibility of proposed routes and even travelled to some Yukon communities, the final decision was made under the pressure of war.

The Alaska Highway itself was built in two phases: first, the pioneer road was constructed by the U.S. military and some civilian contractors: then a permanent road was built by the United States Public Roads Administration (P.R.A.) and the War Department, using Canadian and American civilian workers. The pioneer road was built by seven regiments of the U.S. Army Engineer Corps, including 394 officers and 10,765 enlisted men. As well, 47 contractors under the supervision of the Public Roads Administration employed a further 7,500 men. Three regiments worked in British Columbia; one worked in Alaska. Three other regiments reached Whitehorse in April 1942. From there, one worked north to Alaska while another worked south to Teslin; the third regiment was sent to Teslin by boat and worked south to Watson Lake. Construction camps or "line camps" were located at 10- to 15-mile intervals along the route and at every major bridge site. Each camp housed between one hundred and two hundred men. Main camps were at Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Whitehorse and Tok. "Overnight, the population of Whitehorse rose from 754 to 20,000, and an array of army buildings, supply depots and warehouses appeared around the city. The

pioneer road was completed on 20 November 1942, eight months after construction began.

The building of the permanent road along the approximate path of the pioneer road was completed in 1943. The work consisted of straightening and upgrading the original road. For this job, the P.R.A. employed 81 contractors who in turn employed 14,000 men. They were assisted by 1,850 employees of the P.R.A. itself. The work was done by dividing contractors into two shifts, each working ten to twelve hours a day with equipment working twenty-two hours a day. This permanent road was completed on 31 October 1943, although twenty bridges remained to be finished. Within a year and a half, a total of 34,637 men came to a relatively isolated part of the world where only a few thousand people made their homes.

Related projects accompanied the building of the Alaska Highway, opening up an entire communications system. In the winter of 1940-41, Canada had released funds to build a chain of airfields across northern British Columbia and the Yukon - the Northwest Staging Route. A series of airfields were built at Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Watson Lake and Whitehorse, extending to Northway, Big Delta and Fairbanks, Alaska. Construction of the Haines Road to Alaska, begun in December 1942, further increased road access to the southwest Yukon. The Canol, or Canadian Oil, Project, funded by the United States and built by the United States Army and Canadian labour, pushed through a short-lived road and pipeline from the Alaska Highway to Norman Wells, Northwest Territories. A refinery was built at Whitehorse. Started in 1943, the project was abandoned in 1945, soon after it was completed.

On 1 April 1946, the Canadian government took over the Alaska Highway, and the Canadian army began administering the Northwest Highways System. At first, camps were strung along the highway at places like Brooks Brook, Canyon and Koidern. But by the late 1950's, there was an increasing tendency to concentrate workers and their families in centres such as Haines Junction and Whitehorse and, ultimately, in the Camp Takhini enclave at Whitehorse.

With transportation routes clearly shifting away from the river, a new road connecting Whitehorse, Mayo and Dawson City was begun in 1951 and was completed and upgraded in 1953. When it was finished, the Yukon's capital was transferred from Dawson City to Whitehorse. Subsequent roads, such as the Robert Campbell loop from Watson Lake to Faro to Carmacks, were built to accommodate the mining industry.

A project the size and scope of the Alaska Highway has a range of consequences, some anticipated, others entirely unforeseen. The impact of the highway on Indian subsistence patterns and social institutions falls in the latter category, partly because these were not issues considered particularly important in the context of the Second World War, and partly because the real consequences were long-term rather than short-term and can only be appreciated in hindsight. In order to analyze a range of interrelated consequences, one must examine: the overall impact of the highway on the subsistence pattern; its influence on employment patterns and cash income; the effects of government programmes on family life; the effects on demography and health; and finally, the effects on native values.

Consequently, native elders say that in 1942 fur prices were lower than they had been for years. Many native families who traded at posts near new highway route (Teslin, Champagne, Burwash Landing) decided, for the first time, not to trap that winter but rather to remain at the post or go to Whitehorse to seek employment related to highway construction. After the highway was completed, many of these people continued to live year-round along the highway, where they were joined by other natives from more distant areas. A steady drift of natives from all over the Yukon to the margins of Whitehorse has continued ever since.

Once the road from Whitehorse to Mayo and Dawson was built, and the riverboats no longer ran, Indians began to abandon river communities such as Upper Laberge, Lower Laberge, Big Salmon, Little Salmon, and Fort Selkirk. They moved closer to the roads with the intention of getting wage work to supplement an unstable income based on deteriorating fur prices.

A similar population decline at traditional native centres of Hutshi, Aishihik and Kloo Lake followed road construction. The creation of new permanent villages, such as Watson Lake, Haines Junction, Beaver Creek and Pelly Crossing, and the growth of older villages such as Teslin, Carmacks and Burwash Landing, can be attributed directly to road construction.

Most natives who moved to the highway or to Whitehorse from other areas could no longer maintain their old subsistence patterns. The land adjacent to the highway was limited, and earlier residents resented the competition of newcomers from elsewhere, especially as game and fish supplies dwindled.

Additional competition for resources came from highway workers. In 1942, the commanding officer of the United States Engineer Corps requested from the Yukon territorial government special hunting privileges for the United States Army and for Canadian civilians working on the highway. After

considerable correspondence on the subject, United States Army personnel and civilians working on the road were granted resident hunting licences while they were working in the Yukon. Indian people have stated repeatedly that some soldiers shot moose and other large game animals for sport and then had to return to work before they could get the meat out. Similarly, soldiers reportedly caught fish on their days off and left behind what they could not consume. This kind of waste ran counter to native ethical codes and directly affected Indians who relied on animal resources for food.

Perhaps the most obvious result of this sport hunting along the highway was the establishment of the Kluane Game Sanctuary. Its creation eliminated Indian hunting rights in an area where they had formerly hunted and trapped. In December 1942, the Governor-General of Canada signed an order-in-council placing about 10,000 square miles in reserve. During the summer of 1943, a team of specialists (a mammalogist, a forester and the controller of national parks) examined the southwest Yukon and reported that it was seriously depleted of game because of the new accessibility provided by the Alaska Highway and the Haines Road. That same year, an amendment was made to the existing territorial game ordinance giving the Commissioner of the Yukon power to declare a two-mile wide "no shooting" zone along the Alaska Highway and creating the Kluane Game Sanctuary. Hunting and trapping by Indians and whites was prohibited within the sanctuary.

Yet according to the fur supervisor for Indian affairs in Ottawa at the time:

The limited correspondence on our files concerning this sanctuary would indicate that the decimation of the big game resources in the area was the direct result of too intensive big game hunting by whites generally and particularly by U.S. Army personnel of the Alaska Highway construction crews. The Indians, therefore, who from time immemorial had hunted and trapped over the area without decimating the supply of big game animals have now to bear the brunt of rehabilitation.

After considerable discussion, the area was later opened by special permit to Indians for "supervised" muskrat hunting between the White and Donjek Rivers and for hunting of bull moose. But Indian people at Kluane Lake, whose livelihood was seriously disturbed by the restrictions on their traditional hunting territory, continued to blame the highway for troubles caused by the game sanctuary.

Indians who had formerly fished at Dalton Post and Klukshu found their lands arbitrarily bisected by the Haines road. New regulations cut them off from what were once their chief resources at a time when they had few other ways of procuring either food or cash.

The highway left another legacy. Publicity generated by the media and by the thousands of people who passed through the territory during construction created the image of the Yukon as a desirable place to hunt big game trophies. A "Director of Game and Publicity" was put in charge of wildlife management. A new perception of wildlife as an export commodity came into vogue.

The introduction of registered traplines shortly after the highway was built further complicated the economic picture. The government-imposed plan did not take into account the natives' matrilineal social organization which had formerly regulated use and inheritance of land.

All these factors, including new transportation routes and new methods travel, low fur prices, availability of seasonal work in highway communities increased pressure on wildlife and new government regulations about hunting and trapping, combined to limit the ability of families to provide their basic needs as they had in the past. By the late 1940's, only a few families spent entire winters on traplines or engaged in extensive summer meat hunts. More and more it became necessary for men to earn cash income by new kinds of seasonal labour, often at low wages.

Very marked changes in annual cycle and settlement patterns then directly followed construction of major roads. As an elderly Teslin native explained, "Before the highway came and split us all in different ways, we used to feed ourselves good from this country."

The Alaska Highway also affected native employment patterns, cash income, and technology. Initially, some Yukon Indians benefited from opportunities for wage employment brought by highway construction, A few men got jobs doing slashing, general construction work, and guiding. The guides were invaluable because they knew the country best; in fact, they determined much of the actual ground route the pioneer road took.

Indian women earned money taking in laundry, cleaning maintenance camps, and sewing mukluks, jackets and mitts to sell to construction workers. A number made considerable incomes during the construction period: a Carcross woman says she made \$900 sewing during the summer of 1942, while another in Whitehorse made \$3,500 taking in soldiers laundry between April and November 1942. Still another sold mukluks and mitts to soldiers and saved enough money to buy her family a truck. She enlisted the help of her husband and son-in-law who took boxes of items to the airport and sold them to departing

soldiers. One time her son-in-law came back without a coat: someone had offered him eighty dollars for it. Another time her husband was wearing a caribou coat trimmed with beaver which she had made for him. A soldier asked if he could buy it. How much? Five hundred dollars, the son-in-law suggested hopefully. The soldier produced five one hundred dollar bills.

There was a certain amount of euphoria at first; times looked good and certainly interesting. One native man described how, in 1942, the army bought dogs to train for dog teams needed for construction work. Fur prices were low, and dogs were expensive to feed. Indians who had jobs did not expect to need the dogs again, so no one objected greatly to selling the animals. Later, when they had to return to trapping as a chief source of income, the natives who lacked dogs were seriously handicapped. What had seemed a small thing at the time came to make a great difference.

The sudden influx of cash meant a chance to experiment with new technology. While they were earning money in the spring of 1943, some people were able to buy cars to take advantage of the opening of the road to civilian traffic. They travelled extensively that summer, but by the fall, the cars began to break down, and most owners decided not to fix them. Those who had cars were frequently asked to lend them, making maintenance expensive. More importantly, many people were injured or killed in accidents.

Most of the jobs held by natives in 1942 and 1943 were short-term. Once the boom was over and the construction workers had left, many Indian families were less clear about their economic futures than ever before. Employment as pilots, deckhands and cooks on the riverboats disappeared in the early 1950's, when riverboats were withdrawn from service and replaced by road transport. Some Indians had worked for white contractors for decades cutting wood for boats during summer. Often they developed relationships not unlike those with fur traders, getting supplies each year and going into debt to the contractor.

Still, people continued to move out to the highway or to the subsequent branch roads looking for work. That they considered the move temporary was indicated by the large number of possessions they left behind in their old homes. When they returned they sometimes found their houses had been thoroughly looted.

Once in Whitehorse or in one of the smaller settlements along the highway, women sometimes found work in laundries, cafes, or hotels. Some wives brought in larger incomes than their husbands, since temporary jobs were usually the only kind of work available to Indian men. Thus many Indian men found themselves no longer able to provide for their families. Increasingly, native families were forced to rely for their livelihood on the more readily available government subsidies. These government programmes had a wide-ranging effect on Indian families.

The postwar expansion of government legislation and administrative agencies across Canada was facilitated in the Yukon by the new communications corridor. Government agents could now travel north, and Indian families could be relocated at settlements if they wanted access to schools, medical facilities, or social assistance programmes.

The 1944-45 Family Allowance Act made special provision for Indian families, but cheques were not issued directly to them. Rather, benefits were administered by the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources, which greatly increased its Yukon activities after the completion of the highway. By 1946, 165 Yukon Indian families with 483 children were registered. Family allowances were offered as a direct inducement to register children in schools.

The 1952 Revised Act to Provide Old Age Assistance brought another small source of income directly to Indian families with members over seventy years of age. As a result, the former close ties between old and young sometimes became strained when younger natives, unable to find work themselves, began to exploit the old as an easy source of cash. And, as English became the dominant working language, many young people could no longer communicate easily with their grandparents whose way of life and values they could not fully understand.

Sketchy statistics from the annual reports of the Indian Affairs Branch during the 1940's show the growing emphasis placed on Indian education in the Yukon. The number of students attending day schools increased as new schools were constructed in highway settlements. Once native children were integrated into the territorial school system, parents who wanted their children to live at home while they attended school had to move to settlements where schools were located. This meant that women with children could no longer accompany their husbands on traplines. Men found it difficult to trap for extended periods of time when they had to take on the additional burden of women's work in the bush. From 1942 to 1949, the number of schools rose from two to eight and the Indian students from 26 to 227. During the same time period, welfare expenditures by the Indian Affairs Branch doubled.

As government activities expanded, a host of new agencies began to operate in these villages, usurping the former functions of kin groups by providing economic support, social control, health care, and education. Many agencies dealt primarily with women who now remained in the villages with their children while their husbands left to seek work in Whitehorse or elsewhere, to hunt, to trap, or to accompany big game hunting parties. In many cases, mothers were directly eligible for various forms of family assistance and could have their own independent incomes. As one husband put it, "The government became my wife's old man. She didn't need me any more."

In the short term, many of the government services obviously benefited those Indians who had no other resources, but the cumulative effect of living in government-administered communities with no solid economic base also meant social breakdown in many families. A sense of frustration set in. **Older people identify "the highway" as the time when traditional institutions began to break down.**

The highway also had an effect on demography, health, and alcohol use. Although native villages were officially off limits to the army, the arrival of so many men from "outside" could not help but affect Indian-white relationships and particularly male-female relationships. Soldiers and construction workers were attractive to some women because they represented a life which seemed exciting and different, and because they seemed to have a lot of money. A few whites married Indian girls and took them home, thus reducing the chances of marriage for young Indian men, especially for those who adhered to moiety rules. Many white men formed short-term liaisons with native women whom they later abandoned. Older people describe the tragedies of girls who froze to death after drinking parties or who died in other violent ways because of their association with the men.

The army maintained relatively tight control over its personnel, but there were abuses. Records describe an incident at the Carcross Residential School in which two soldiers were discovered making regular overnight visits to the girls' dormitory. They were court-martialled the following spring and were given a sentence of eight months hard labour and a dishonourable discharge. Police records also refer to alcohol related incidents such as "two American soldiers procuring liquor for an Indian man in an attempt to obtain the services of his two daughters."

As early as 1943, there were a number of birth registrations with father listed as "unknown," and three letters from Indian mothers to the Yukon territorial government asking the government to locate white men who had abandoned their daughters with children. By 1944-45, the government was discussing plans for an ordinance to provide for the maintenance of the children of unmarried parents. By 1947, the government became concerned about the status of "illegitimate" children with white fathers and Indian mothers. After much debate, it was decided that these children should be recognized as Indians."

The net result of an influx of restless, dislocated males was to expose the native people to a new and distorted pattern of social behaviour in which promiscuity was no longer condemned, as it was in their traditional code. The moiety system began to lose its significance, and this caused great confusion about expected social obligations and support. The old rules ceased to work as they had in the past, yet it was difficult to adjust them readily to a rapid barrage of unexpected new regulations or freedoms which Indians themselves had not created.

Among the most immediate and horrifying results of the coming of the highway were the epidemics brought to settlements along the route. Any discussion of genealogies or old family photographs leads to commentary on people who "died in '42" or people who became ill during or after the construction. A doctor described how families remained at the Teslin post in the winter of 1942-43, hoping for jobs. During that winter they were overwhelmed by measles, dysentery, jaundice, whooping cough, mumps, tonsillitis and meningitis. Only the Indian population was affected. During the winter, the same report notes, diphtheria took three lives at Ross River on the Canol Road, and pneumonia caused many deaths in northern British Columbia.

Many people are said to have died at McDame, just south of the Yukon border in British Columbia, and survivors fled to the new village of Lower Post. At Telegraph Creek on the upper Stikine River, the route used to transport men and materials to Watson Lake, sickness reportedly caused the deaths of most of the old people in the community. Anglican Church records mention a dysentery epidemic at Champagne in 1942. The same report notes that at Klukshu, then away from any highway, there was "very little sickness. An Anglican missionary at Champagne in the summer of 1942 wrote that the epidemic began when "some Indians arrived from Whitehorse and brought the dysentery with them. Nearly all the Indians caught the disease one after another during the next three weeks ... (we) obtained medicine from the Army camp nearby." He recorded two deaths at Champagne. For good reason, a government agent wrote to Ottawa in 1943 of his grave alarm about health conditions all along the highway.

Indians remember these epidemics most vividly when discussing the highway. They grieve especially the deaths of children. One woman who lost a daughter in 1942 recalled a family who tried to leave Whitehorse to return home to Champagne. One of their children died eight miles from Whitehorse. In panic, they hurried back to Whitehorse. Another child died that afternoon. By evening they had lost a third. Another woman living near Ross River in 1943, on the route of the Canol Road to Norman Wells, described how her mother was able to save some children by swabbing their throats with iodine. She remembers the army construction workers stopping work to build caskets for all the children who died.

Efforts to improve health care did eventually follow the construction of the Alaska Highway. A massive tuberculosis X-ray clinic toured the full length of the Alaska Highway between 1947 and 1949, bringing people in from their camps for tests. The roads also provided better access to the hospital at Whitehorse, and health services improved significantly. However, one reason government agents urged families to move to the highway was so they could avoid expensive medical flights to isolated bush camps and villages. Although long-term hospitalization in Edmonton and Vancouver often meant survival for natives who might otherwise have died, the patients, especially young ones who had been away from their families for long periods of time, found readjustment to the Yukon very difficult.

A major change in the use of alcohol also accompanied the soldiers and construction crews. In the 1940's, it was still illegal for Indians to purchase alcohol. Alcohol had actually been used since the time of the gold rush, but usually in well-defined public contexts, "to show respect" to those of the opposite moiety. People say that in the 1920's and 1930's, it was used mainly to celebrate specific occasions, privately and infrequently, and by adults only. If parents planned to drink, they say, they made sure their children were safely cared for in another home. When soldiers and construction workers came, they brought alcohol to Indian homes openly and often. In some cases it was a genuine gesture of friendship; in other cases, it was clearly used to take advantage. Younger Indians began to drink, some of them heavily.

R.C.M.P. statistics show an enormous increase in liquor-related offences during and after the construction of the highway. Records of the twelve-year period from 1936-48 document this dramatically. Charges against Indians rose from 11 to 106, increasing more than tenfold. In this context, though, it is significant that in 1943-44, at the height of the highway development, Indians were still far in the minority of persons charged. For example, in 1944, a total of 401 charges were laid by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police: only 44 of them were under the "Indian Act." While increased numbers of charges may simply reflect increased police personnel or zeal, the exposure to the courts was simply a further intrusion of government authority into an area formerly regulated by family and community.

Older natives overwhelmingly maintain that the highway brought alcohol abuse and an alarming amount of violence, grief and further social disruption. Some Indians became enfranchised and gave up other government benefits so that they might purchase liquor without legal discrimination. Not until 1967 was legislation changed, giving Indians the same rights as other Canadians to purchase liquor in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. But by then, alcohol abuse had become the serious problem that it is today for both natives and whites in the north.

Dramatic changes in demography, in health conditions and in alcohol abuse directly accompanied the construction phase of the highway. Once the road was completed, the problems it brought continued over the years as people moved from the bush to new communities. In these communities, traditional social institutions were less able to deal with the new problems.

Some of the most obvious effects that the highway has had on Indian customs and values have already been touched upon, but Indians who experienced the building of the highway and who have tried to assess the current state of their culture cite still other changes, some of which are also reflected in government records. For example, the older natives frequently refer to the fact that the soldiers stole, taking valued personal items from the traditional gravehouses or fences, or necessary equipment or irreplaceable ceremonial items from cabins. These things were taken as souvenirs, not because they were needed, and the Indians found this behaviour impossible to understand. The whites apparently got away with stealing from the Indians without serious consequences. There were major problems involved in policing the civilian camps, but troublemakers were usually given a free ride home under an international agreement. Faced with such examples, a few Indians began to commit similar violations. R.C.M.P. files show that in 1950, thirteen Indians were charged with theft: of articles in caches, store goods, furs, liquor, and other items. These violations would have been neither necessary nor tolerated in traditional native society.

To make matters worse, and in contrast with the treatment of soldiers and construction

workers, Indians were severely punished, often out of all proportion to the violations. Considerable correspondence concerns one case where a white man gave an Indian man liquor. The Indian man went "joy riding" in a truck and was sentenced to one year in jail. Another case is documented where a young native man, convicted of theft, was sentenced to one year in jail. Months later, it was discovered that he was only twelve years old. Similarly, two teenage Indian girls convicted of shoplifting were each sentenced to one year in jail.

These kinds of convictions had a noticeable impact on native communities. Discipline, always the prerogative of the family, began to fall to outside authorities: teachers, police courts, medical specialists, and later, to a whole host of government agencies.

Another pattern of behaviour introduced by the highway which ran directly counter to the native ethic was the incredible waste of army and construction camps, and the ruling that food and materials had to be destroyed or abandoned rather than distributed when personnel left the area. This was because the government felt distribution would constitute unfair competition to local businesses. The Indians recall "potholes filled with hams," "bags of flour dumped in the garbage," and so on. Such behaviour was repugnant to people who had always made maximum use of their environment. Such waste, which the older Indians have never forgotten, seemed a betrayal of man's obligation to share. All these events and attitudes, as well as others, steadily eroded the traditional value system without offering acceptable alternatives.

In conclusion then, the economy and society of the region now known as the Yukon has twice undergone dramatic metamorphoses: first in 1896-98 with the Klondike gold rush, then in 1942-45 with the construction of the Alaska Highway. Each event has generated a literature which describes it as adventure. Yet each was also part of a more prosaic process, the expansion of the Canadian state into the margins of northern North America and the establishment of an infrastructure which has continued to shape the Yukon's economy and society.

The Alaska Highway can be considered a classic example of corridor development. It was built at tremendous capital cost to serve "national interests." It was constructed by a large imported labour force through an isolated area inhabited mostly by native people. The construction phase was extremely rapid: short-term jobs were created for a few local people. Once the construction phase was over, the boom ended. However, the new road created new villages and opened a communications system which continued to change the lives of nearby residents. It also changed the ethnic balance, making Indians a decided minority in the Yukon.

It can be argued that these changes were initiated during the construction phase of the highway; however, the institutionalization of those changes came in the years following construction when a dramatically increased government presence in the north was facilitated by the establishment of the communications route. Government departments placed restrictions on trapping and hunting, effectively altering the native mode of production. Federal and territorial agencies armed with new legislation began to usurp social roles and institutions formerly under the authority of kin groups. The new communications corridor facilitated the arrival and effectiveness of these programmes and agencies. **In the years during and following construction, irreversible changes occurred in the lives of Indians living along the route. Such changes occurred in two broad areas: first, in the relationship between Indians and their land, and second, in longstanding social institutions associated with kinship.**

The highway was a decisive factor bringing Yukon Indians to the marginal position they have in the present Yukon economy and society. Development has continued to take place independently of Yukon Indian communities ever since, and frequently the natives have borne the social costs.

Forty years later, as celebrations of the anniversary of the Alaska Highway construction get underway, it is these same issues which concern Yukon Indian leaders negotiating their land claims settlement: their relationship to the land, their relationship to the economy, and their social institutions. In 1982, we have just passed through a decade of investigations into the potential social and environmental impact of large-scale development projects in the north. The Alaska Highway might serve as a case study of how seemingly short-term projects can have long range, far-reaching effects.

Notes

This paper is a revised version of evidence presented by Dr. Catharine McClellan and myself at the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry on 5 May 1976. Although we prepared the testimony together I take full responsibility for any errors in this revised paper.

1. Dr. Catharine McClellan has worked as an anthropologist in the southern Yukon periodically since 1948 and is the author of a number of ethnographic studies including a two volume work *MY Old People Sat*, (National Museums of Canada, 1975). The author has worked as a researcher in the Yukon and Alaska since 1968, and the oral accounts used for this study were recorded while I was compiling genealogies, biographies, family histories, photographic histories and traditional stories in the course of my work with the Yukon Native Languages Project. Over the years Dr. McClellan and myself have each been involved in discussions with people who experienced the coming of the Alaska Highway.
2. Catharine McClellan, "Introduction" to Special Issue: "Athapaskan Studies." *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 2, no. 1, (1970): vi-xix; J. Vanstone, *Athapaskan Adaptations*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1974).
3. Catharine McClellan, *Mv Old People Sar*, Publications in Ethnology No. 6 (2 vols.). (National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, 1975), passim; Julie Cruikshank, *Through the Eyes of Strangers*, (Yukon Territorial Government and Yukon Archives, 1974).
4. Julie Cruikshank, *When The World Began*, (Whitehorse: Department of Education, 1978); Julie Cruikshank, comp., *MY Stories Are mr Wealth*, by Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith and Rachel Dawson, (Whitehorse: Council for Yukon Indians, 1978); Angela Sidney, *Tagish Tlaagti*, recorded by J. Cruikshank (Whitehorse: Council for Yukon Indians and Department of Education, 1982).
Catharine McClellan, *Culture Change and Native Trade in the Southern Yukon Territory*. Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology. University of California, Berkeley, 1950.
6. Robert McCandless, *Trophies or Meat: Yukon Game Management 1896-191 h*. (Yukon Territorial Government, 1977), p. 32.
7. Adrian Tanner, *The Structure of Fur Trade Relations*, M.A. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, 1965.
8. Leslie Bullen. *An Historical Study of the Education of the Indians of Teslin, Yukon Territory*. M.Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1968.
9. *Canada Yearbook, 1973-1974*. • *Historical Statistics of Canada*, ed. M.C. Urquart (Toronto: MacMillan, 1965), p. 304.
10. Adrian Tanner. *Trappers, Hunters and Fishermen: Wildlife Utilization in the Yukon Territory*. Yukon Research Project No. 5, Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre (Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. 1966) pp. 8-10. Tanner writes that fur prices were high until 1914, dropped between 1914-17, rose until 1929 and again after 1935, but began to fall again after 1946.
11. *Whitehorse Star*, 6 January 1939, p. 1.
12. The 35th, 95th and 341st regiments worked in British Columbia: the 97th worked in Alaska; the 18th, 93rd and 340th were sent to the Yukon.
13. House of Representatives, *The Alaska Highway: An Interim Report From the Committee on Roads*. #2255, (1946), pp. 4, 53.
14. Jim Lotz, *Northern Realities*. (1970), p. :)4.
15. Arthur E. Buckley, *The Alaska Highway*, M.Sc. thesis, University of Alabama. 1956, pp. 29-50.
16. Letter dated 30 April 1942, government records. YTA, file 466.
17. Letter from Mr. Gibson, director, Department of Resources and Development, 3 May 1948, to George Black. M.P. for the Yukon; on file, YTA.
18. Ordinance, Yukon Territory, ch. 4.
19. Letter from H.R. Conn, Fur Supervisor, Indian Affairs Branch, Ottawa, to R.J. Meek, Superintendent of Indian Agency, Whitehorse, 22 May 1950; on file, YTA.
20. McCandless, *Trophies or Meat*, pp. 53-54.
21. Indian Affairs Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, *Annual Report, 1940*.
22. The former "Old Age Pension Act." 1927, specifically excluded Indians.
23. From Indian Affairs Branch, *Annual Reports* from 1942 to 1949. Figures come from "Statement of Ordinary Expenditures. Education."
24. Figures from Indian Affairs Branch, *Annual Reports* from 1942 to 1949, from "Statement of Ordinary Expenditures, Welfare."
25. YTA. RG 10, vol. 6479. file 940-1, pt. 2.
26. R.C.M.P. Files, 1949-50. Prosecutions under the Indian Act, Section 135 or 128, YTA.
27. Government records, YTA, box 6.5, file 518.
28. *Ibid.*, box 9, file 1490.
29. John Marchand, "Tribal Epidemics in the Yukon." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 123, (1943): 1019-20.
30. Mrs. Eva Callbreath, formerly of Telegraph Creek, identified a number of people in old photographs taken in that community by ethnologist James Teit in 1912 and 1915. Her comments suggest that a significant number of people in the photos died in 1942.
31. *Northern Lights*, 31, no. 3, (November 1942).
32. Klukshu is still a summer fish camp on the Haines Road.
33. Anglican Church records, letter on file, YTA.
34. Letter from C.K. Le Capelain, liaison officer, to R.A. Gibson, Department of Mines and Resources, 19 July 1943:

The Indians of the Teslin and Lower Post bands until the advent of this new era, have been almost completely isolated from contacts with white people and, have had the least opportunity of creating an immunity to white peoples' diseases. Consequently they have been distressingly affected by the new contacts. No doubt a contributing factor has been the fact that to a considerable extent the adult males have abandoned their normal nomadic pursuits and have accepted work on various construction projects, both American and Canadian.

The band at Teslin suffered epidemics of measles and whooping cough, which in some cases developed into pneumonia, last year, and now are plagued with an epidemic of meningitis and have suffered three deaths so far from the latter. The hands at Lower Post were devastated last spring with an epidemic of influenza which caused 15 deaths among a total population of about 150 of all ages. There is no doubt in my mind that if events are allowed to drift along at will, but what the Indian bands at Teslin and Lower Post will become completely decimated within the next few years. The

problem is how to prevent this, or at least to ameliorate conditions as far as possible.

35. Government records, YTA, box 65, file 813.
36. Police court records. Whitehorse, 1901-51, YTA, file 33937-8-D. 37. Ibid.
38. Decision of Mr. Justice Morrow in the Joseph Drybones case, June 1967.
39. Government records, correspondence, Gibben, 3 October 1942, YTA, file 466.
40. R.C.M.P. files 1949-50, Prosecutions Under the Indian Act, Section 128 or 135, YTA.
41. Government records, YTA, box 9, file 1490.
42. R.C.M.P. files. 19d9-50, 43. Ibid.

Social Impacts of the Alaska High stay on Yukon Indians