

NPS Form 10-900OMB No. 1024-0018  
(Rev. 10-90)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Valdez Trail (Copper Bluff Segment)

other names/site number Abercrombie Trail; Trans-Alaska Military Trail; Eagle Trail; Fairbanks Trail; Richardson Road.

## 2. Location

street & number Milepost 106.5, Richardson Highway not for publication

city or town Copper Center vicinity X

state Alaska code AK county Valdez-Cordova code 261

zip code 99573

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official

1-14-98  
Date

National Park Service  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Judith Bittner Nov 19, 1997  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

Jonathan K. Jarvis - APS-WRST  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
    \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- \_\_\_ determined eligible for the  
    National Register  
    \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- \_\_\_ determined not eligible for the  
    National Register
- \_\_\_ removed from the National Register
- \_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson A. Beall 2/12/98

for Signature of Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- \_\_\_ private
- \_\_\_ public-local
- \_\_\_ public-State
- X public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- \_\_\_ building(s)
- \_\_\_ district
- X site
- \_\_\_ structure
- \_\_\_ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> buildings
<u>  1  </u>	<u>    </u> sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Historic Properties Associated with the Valdez Trail, 1898-1943.

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>TRANSPORTATION</u>	Sub: <u>pedestrian-related</u>
<u>TRANSPORTATION</u>	<u>road-related (vehicular)</u>

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>TRANSPORTATION</u>	Sub: <u>road-related (vehicular)</u>
<u>RECREATION AND CULTURE</u>	<u>outdoor recreation</u>

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>N/A</u>
roof	<u>N/A</u>
walls	<u>N/A</u>
other	<u>earth (roadbed)</u>

Narrative Description:

The Valdez Trail is an approximately 700-mile-long, pioneer transportation corridor, constructed between 1899 and 1907 to connect Prince William Sound with interior Alaska's Copper, Tanana, and Yukon River valleys. This particular segment, built in 1900 and probably by-passed by the Alaska Road Commission in 1919, is located approximately 4.7 miles northwest of Copper Center, Alaska, just north of the Richardson Highway in Township 3N, Range 1W, Sections 22, 23, and 26, Copper River Meridian. It consists of a narrow, earthen road, wandering through the forest for approximately three-quarters of a mile before ending abruptly at the edge of a naturally eroded bluff. Employed by Alaskan immigrants for virtually a entire generation, it was maintained and utilized by local residents for subsistence activities long after it was officially abandoned.

There are no buildings or structures associated with this trail fragment and probably never were. Except for the presence of the Richardson Highway at its southern end, its setting remains virtually intact. Even the proximity of the paved road does not seriously impact the integrity of the trail segment. It is, after all, the route's direct descendant and effectively illustrates its natural evolution.

This long forsaken piece of the Valdez Trail is primarily distinguished by its eight- to ten-foot-wide, cleared corridor through the subarctic forest. Few constructed features remain, although the northern end of the fragment retains some evidence of having once been crowned and ditched. Historic artifacts, including cans and telegraph wire, litter the forest along its length (see Fig. 6).

Despite its lack of dramatic features, this trail segment retains a high order of integrity. Its location, for example, still illustrates the constraints imposed by Alaska's diverse topography. The trail was originally situated near the edge of the relatively well drained Copper River bluff, for example, in order to avoid the boggy ground further west.

The trail's utilitarian design reflects its only purpose: the efficient movement of people and freight. As it was primarily utilized in winter, few constructed improvements were necessary. Portions, however, were crowned and ditched, suggesting limited summer use. Its width was a function of its expected traffic. In keeping with the Alaska Road Commission's requirements for a winter road, this segment was made sufficiently wide to allow two dogsleds or horse-drawn bobsleds to pass.

Its setting, a typical interior Alaska forest composed of mixed spruce and hardwoods, retains the environmental characteristics of the period in which it was built, and undoubtedly appears very similar. Its setting feels similar as well. Once beyond sight of the existing highway, few traffic noises intrude. The resulting quiet helps convey the route's historic sense of isolation.

The trail's construction materials reveal the limited range of options available to its creators. Unable to transport gravel by horseback for long distances, its builders merely cleared the natural vegetation and leveled the existing dirt.

Its functional workmanship provides invaluable insight into the engineering methods of its day. Not surprisingly, its construction and maintenance was more labor than capital intensive: those responsible relied more heavily on men wielding axes and shovels than they did on mechanized equipment.

When combined with the Valdez Trail's well-documented association with the settlement and development of interior Alaska, these physical features convey an unmistakable sense of this segment's historic identity.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1900-1919  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates 1900  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  
none

Cultural Affiliation Euro-American

Architect/Builder United States Army  
Alaska Road Commission

Statement of Significance:

The Valdez Trail provided the first overland access to much of interior Alaska and played a major role in its subsequent development. The first paths associated with the Valdez Trail were established by Alaska Natives for subsistence activities and trading. Improved by the U.S. Army in 1899 as part of a military packhorse route to Eagle City, it branched to Fairbanks in 1903, following a series of gold discoveries in and around the Tanana Basin. Deemed suitable for only winter dogsled traffic in 1901, within four years it was regularly plied by horse-drawn bobsleds. In 1910 the first wagon travelled the trail from end to end. Only three years later, the first motorized vehicle made the journey. In response to such technological advances, the Alaska Road Commission continuously improved the trail. This particular segment was probably abandoned during a minor realignment of the corridor in 1919, the same year in which the route was formally designated the Richardson Road. A closing thrust in a period of pioneer American trail building, the Valdez Trail channelled people, freight, and mail into the region, promoting mining activity, aiding the development of supporting industries, and hastening the settlement of the Copper, Yukon, and Tanana River valleys. The Copper Bluff segment is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, based on its association with such significant events in Alaska's transportation history.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. *Annual Reports of the Alaska Road Commission, 1905-1913, 1918, 1919, 1920.*

Glenn, Capt. Edwin F., and Capt. William R. Abercrombie. *Report of Explorations in the Territory of Alaska.* Washington: GPO, 1899.

Naske, Claus-M. *Paving Alaska's Trails: The Work of the Alaska Road Commission.* Alaska Historical Commission Studies in History No. 152. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1986.

Records of the Alaska Road Commission. Record Group 30. National Archives-Alaska Region. Anchorage, Alaska.

Schrader, Frank C. "A Reconnaissance of a Part of Prince William Sound and the Copper River District, Alaska, in 1898." In United States Geological Survey, *Twentieth Annual Report of the Survey, 1898-99. Part VII--Explorations in Alaska in 1898, 341-73.* Washington: GPO, 1900.

U.S. Congress. House. *Preliminary Reports, with Estimates, for Wagon Road from Valdez to Fort Egbert, Alaska, and for a Military Trail between the Yukon River and Coldfoot, Alaska.* House Document No. 192. 58th Cong., 3rd sess. Washington: GPO: 1905.

*Valdez News, 1903-1906.*

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: National Archives-Alaska Region, Anchorage, Alaska

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.5

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>6</u>	<u>585224</u>	<u>6877893</u>	3	<u>6</u>	<u>585880</u>	<u>6876842</u>
2	<u>6</u>	<u>585720</u>	<u>6877540</u>	4	<u>        </u>	<u>        </u>	<u>        </u>

     See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning on the Richardson Highway, twenty-five feet due east of its intersection with the centerline of the Copper Bluff segment, the boundary parallels the trail's eastern margin, remaining twenty-five feet east of its centerline, until it reaches the edge of the precipitously eroded bluff overlooking the Copper River. It then proceeds in a southwesterly direction along the edge of the bluff, until it reaches a point twenty-five feet west of the trail's centerline. From there, the boundary parallels the trail's western margin, remaining twenty-five feet west of the trail's centerline until it reaches the trail's intersection with the Richardson Highway. The boundary then follows the edge of the highway in a southeasterly direction back to its point of beginning.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Geoffrey T. Bleakley, Historian  
organization Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve date 08/15/96  
street & number P.O. Box 439 telephone (907) 822-5234  
city or town Copper Center state AK zip code 99573

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)



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**Property Owner**

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

street & number P.O. Box 439

telephone (907) 822-5234

city or town Copper Center

state AK

zip code 99573

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section ILLUSTRATIONS Page 10

COPPER BLUFF SEGMENT  
name of property

VALDEZ-CORDOVA, ALASKA  
county and state

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**12. Illustrations**

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Fig. 1:  
The Valdez Trail

Fig. 2:  
Copper Bluff Segment Location

Fig. 3:  
1912 Valdez Trail Survey Showing Copper Bluff Segment

Fig. 4:  
1949 Aerial Photo Showing Copper Bluff Segment

Fig. 5:  
Typical shot of the Copper Bluff Segment today

Fig. 6:  
Copper Bluff Segment: 1996 Archaeological Survey

Fig. 7:  
Detail from 1996 Archaeological Survey

# THE VALDEZ TRAIL

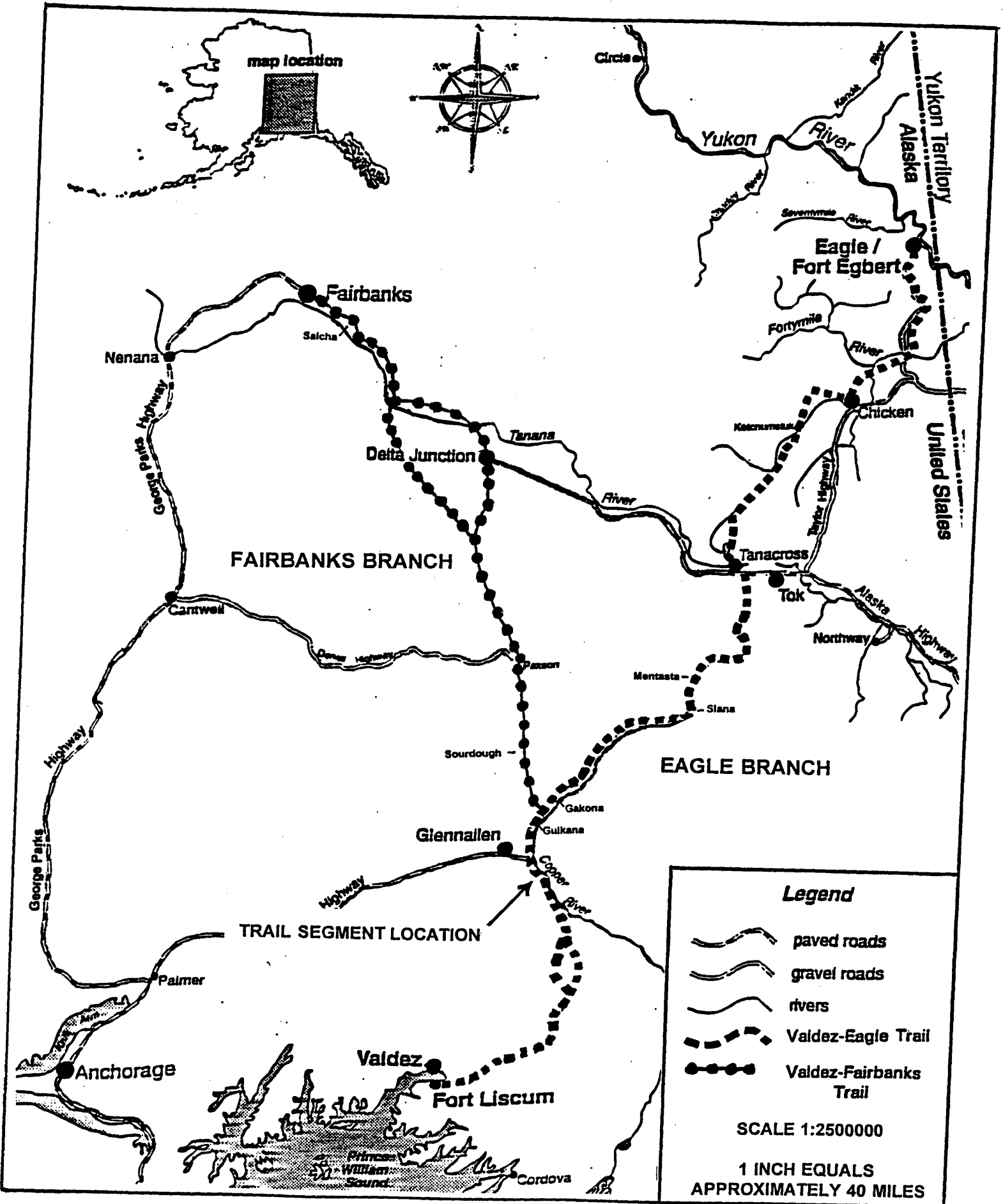


FIG. 1

COPPER BLUFF SEGMENT

GULKANA (A-3) ALASKA  
1949  
MINOR REVISIONS 1975

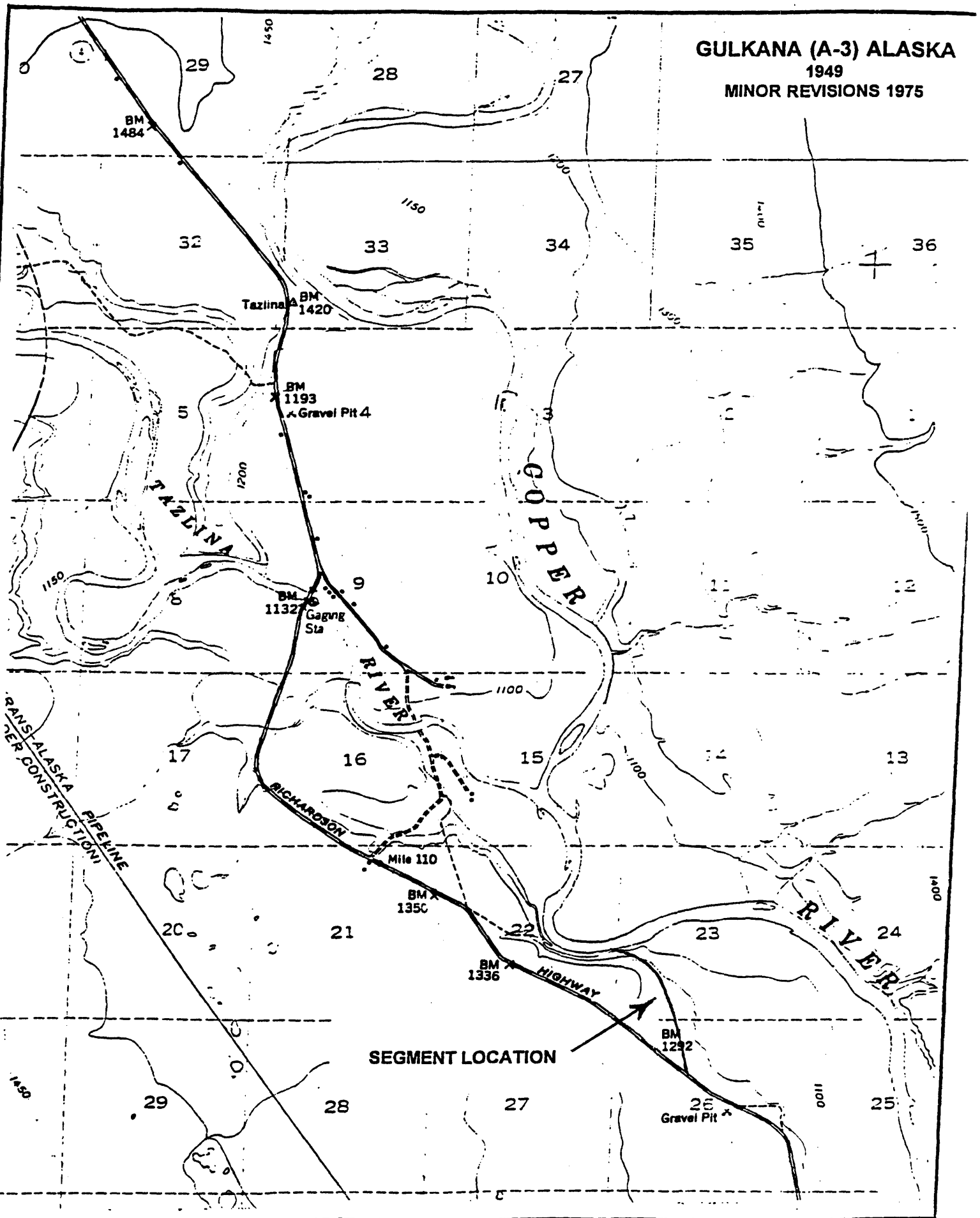
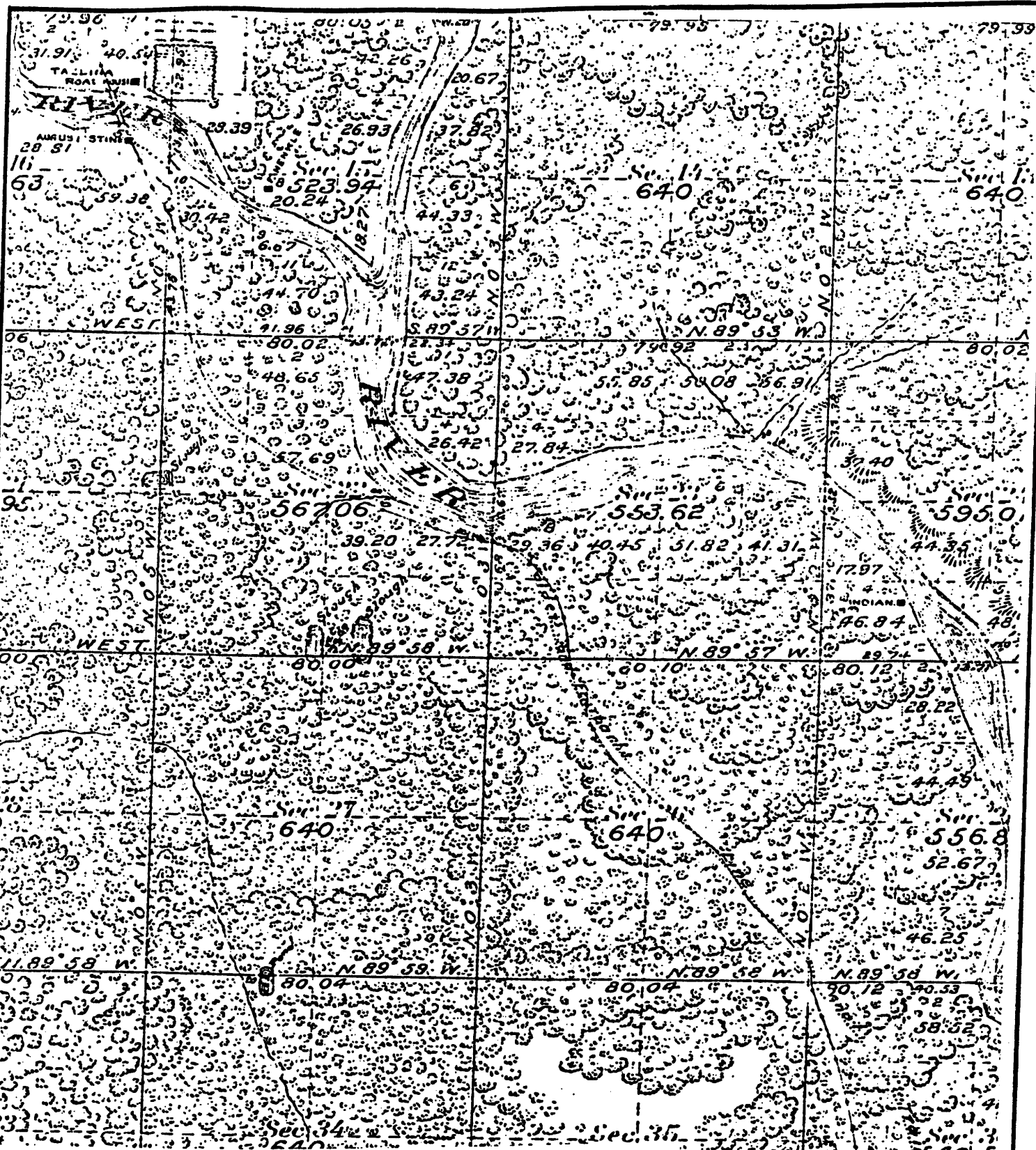


FIG. 2

1912 VALDEZ TRAIL SURVEY



The above map of Township 34 North Range 1 West of the Copper River Meridian Alaska is strictly conformable to the field notes of the survey thereof on file in this office, which have been examined and approved

U. S. Surveyor General A. M. W.

Juneau, Alaska. April 11, 1912.

*M. L. D. [Signature]*  
Surveyor General.

FIG. 3

1949 AERIAL PHOTO

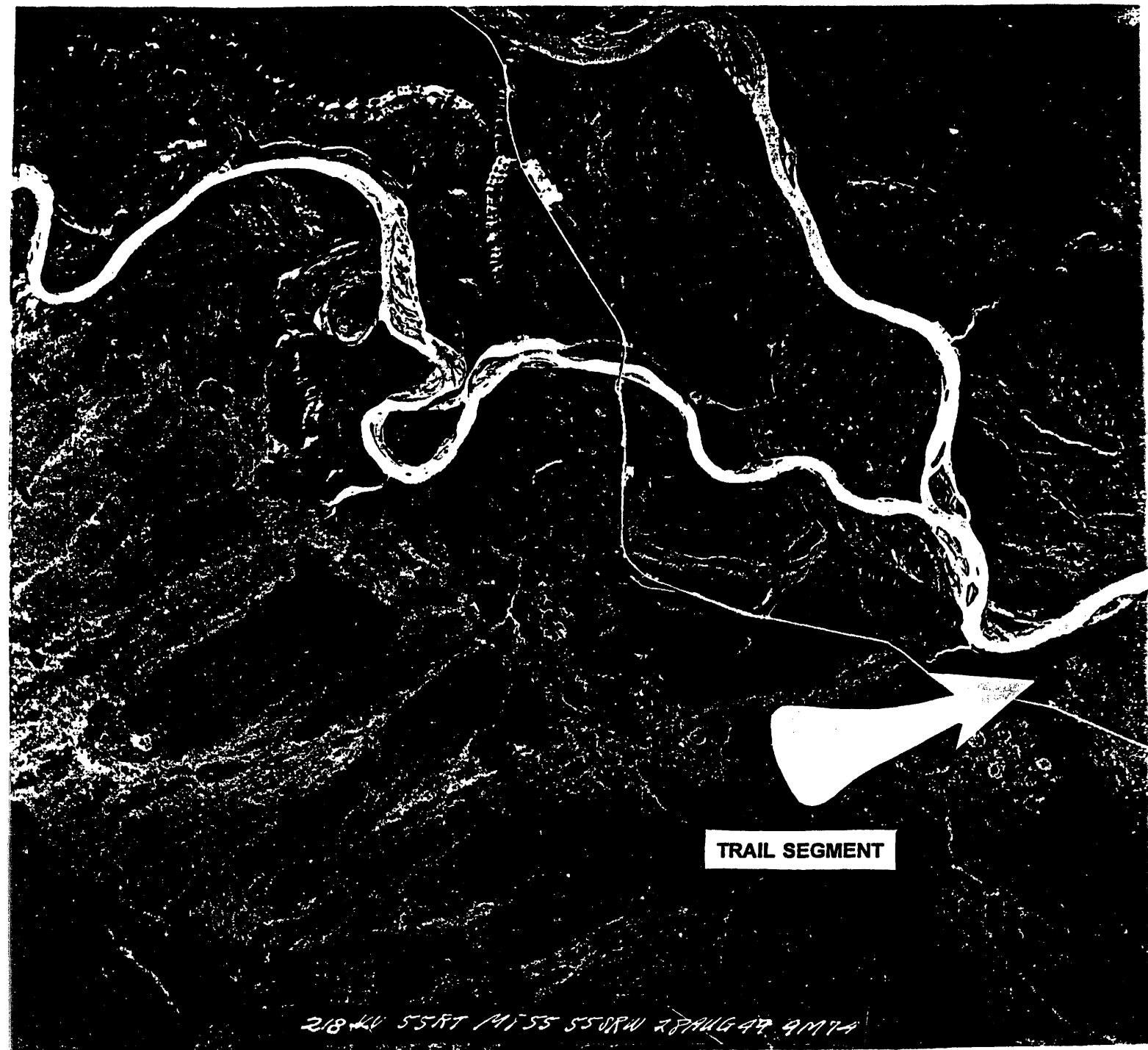


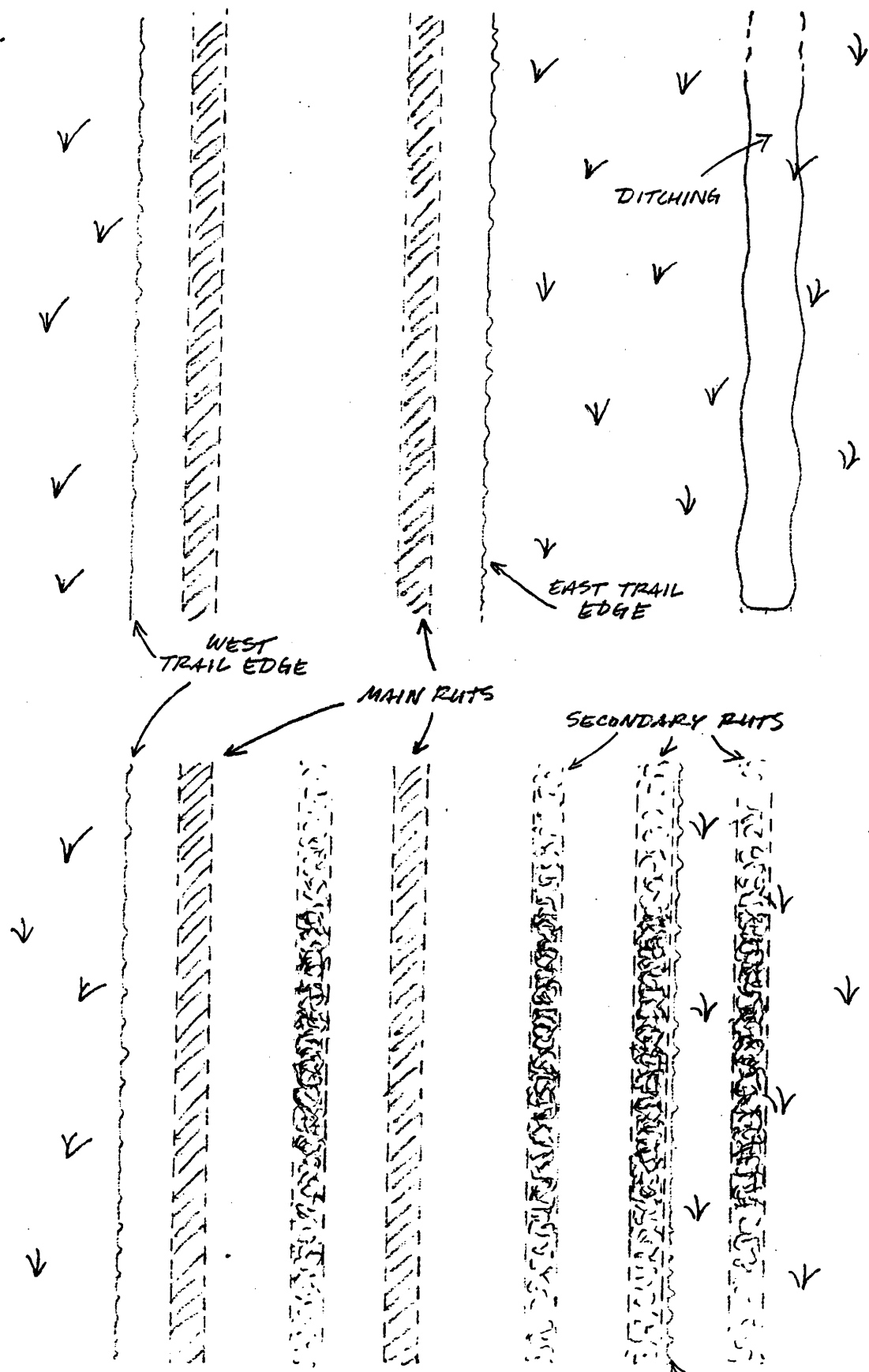
FIG. 4

**TYPICAL SHOT OF THE COPPER BLUFF SEGMENT TODAY**



**FIG. 5**

DETAIL FROM 1996 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY



DITCHING PRESENT ON BOTH SIDES OF TRAIL THROUGH THIS SECTION. DITCHING BEGINS ABRUPTLY THEN FADE AWAY AFTER APPROX. 37 METERS. AVERAGE DITCH DEPTH IS 20 CM. TRAIL WIDTH HERE AVERAGES 2.20 METERS

SECONDARY RUTS FADE IN AND OUT FOR APPROX. 117 METERS. TRAIL WIDTH AVERAGES 3.50 METERS. RUTS ARE BETWEEN 8 AND 12 CM BELOW SURROUNDING SURFACE

1 INCH = 1 METER

0 0.5 1 2 3 M

VALDEZ TRAIL  
1996 FIRST VISITOR  
CENTER SURVEY  
7/26/96  
J. RASIC