

Trading Posts along the Yukon River: Noochuloghoyet Trading Post in Historical Context

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ABSTRACT. Between 1868 and 1900, American companies established a series of trading posts along a 32 km stretch of the Yukon River immediately west of Noochuloghoyet Point, a peninsula formed by the confluence of the Yukon and Tanana rivers. This study makes use of written historical accounts, historical maps, and archaeological evidence to trace the founding and locational movements of these posts. Findings indicate that in the early interior of Alaska rivers were the major transportation routes, and the English and the Russians established trading posts at major river confluences, which became centers for trade. Later, the Americans pursued patterns inherited earlier from the English and the Russians. Political considerations provided the original reason for discovery and some constraints; nevertheless economic and environmental factors appear to have been the more important considerations in the exploration and development of the Yukon River valley. Cultural considerations were only important in that they bracketed the manner in which the Euro-Americans operated.

Key words: fur traders, trading posts, Yukon River, historical maps, historical sites

RÉSUMÉ. Entre 1868 et 1900, des compagnies américaines établirent des postes de traite répartis sur vingt milles le long du cours du Yukon, immédiatement à l'ouest de Noochuloghoyet Point, la péninsule formée par la confluence du Yukon et de la rivière Tanana. La présente étude se sert de récits historiques écrits, de cartes historiques et de preuves archéologiques pour retracer la fondation et les déplacements de ces postes. Les résultats indiquent que, dans l'intérieur de l'Alaska, les cours d'eau étaient les principales voies de transport et que les Anglais et les Russes établirent, aux grands confluent de ces voies d'eau, des postes de traite qui devinrent des centres commerciaux. Les Américains reprirent le modèle des Anglais et des Russes. Ce sont des considérations politiques qui furent à l'origine de la découverte – et qui y attachèrent certaines restrictions –, mais les facteurs économiques et écologiques semblent avoir été des considérations encore plus importantes dans l'exploration et l'exploitation de la vallée du Yukon. Les considérations culturelles n'ont été importantes que dans la mesure où elles ont imposé aux Euraméricains des limites sur leur façon d'opérer.

Mots clés: trappeurs, postes de traite, Yukon, cartes historiques, sites historiques

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INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1800s, when commercial companies sought to exploit the fur resources of the pristine Alaskan wilderness of the interior, the Yukon River became one of the main access routes. The Russian American Company (Russian) established a trading post at Nulato near the confluence of the Yukon and Koyukuk rivers and the Hudson's Bay Company (English) founded Fort Yukon at the junction of the Yukon and Porcupine rivers (Fig. 1). Between Nulato and Fort Yukon is found Noochuloghoyet Point, a peninsula formed by the convergence of the Yukon and Tanana rivers. Originally, this was a place where the Indians met each year to celebrate the change of seasons from winter to spring. Both the Russian American and the Hudson's Bay companies sent trading parties to Noochuloghoyet Point to barter with the Natives for furs but established no trading posts there. Later, after the sale of Russian-America, Americans set up trading posts in the region around Noochuloghoyet Point.

During his 1926 survey of the Yukon River valley, Ales Hrdlicka noticed that when early-period Athabaskan villages changed locations, but stayed in the same general area, they often retained their original names (Hrdlicka, 1930:136). This occurred because the initial village name was often a geographic place-name and construction of the new village was in the same area. Also, the same people lived in both the old and new villages. Frederica de Laguna again noticed this name retention phenomenon when she made an archaeological reconnaissance of the Yukon River in 1935. De Laguna recorded several abandoned sites with the same names, including two Old Melozis, four Lowdens, three Anviks, and three Old Stations. Anvik and Old Station had trading posts associ-

ated with the villages (de Laguna, 1947; Turck, 1991). In 1986, as part of investigations of Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) 14(h)1 applications, Bureau of Indian Affairs archaeologist Ronald Kent and crew members relocated the three former Old Station villages. One is associated with the last location of Noochuloghoyet trading post.

Because of short periods of occupation, radiocarbon dating may not always be applicable to date a particular site, and artifact seriation dating of historical trade items, such as trade beads or ceramics, may span a larger time frame than the short period most trading posts were in operation. Also, due to cost and accessibility, pedestrian survey and site testing are not always feasible. Therefore, in many instances published accounts by early travelers and fur traders become the primary sources for both descriptive and locational information.

As the succeeding study indicates, however, even when trading posts' locations are well documented in written historical accounts and on historical maps, confusion may still exist. As with the Native village sites, problems occur because of vagueries such as calling a post by a manager's name or by a prominent geographic feature, such as Noochuloghoyet Point or the Tanana River. The purpose of this paper, then, is to trace the history of the founding and locational movements of trading posts in the Yukon River area, primarily by the use of historical accounts and maps. Oral history and archaeological evidence are also considered. Following the spatial relationship reconstruction is a discussion of the economic, political, environmental, and cultural factors affecting the founding and relocations of these posts.

Father Julius Jette' (1976:71) wrote, "The confusion between the three 'Old Stations' is second only to that between the various 'Nukluroyits.'" From 1868 to the early 1900s, trading

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posts all called Noochuloghoyet by military and non-military visitors had at least four locations along a 32 km stretch of the Yukon River immediately west of its intersection with the Tanana River. During certain periods, travelers called more than one trading post Noochuloghoyet at the same time. Other visitors called the same trading posts Tanana Station. Consequently, much locational confusion exists in the historical accounts and literature. Figure 2 shows Noochuloghoyet Point labeled A and the former locations of trading posts labeled B-F, while Figure 3 places them in a time frame. Throughout the text, the authors use these letters to assist in identification of the discussed landmark and buildings. Although there may be other reconstructions, the authors believe the following narrative best fits the available data.

The spelling of the trading post will be "Noochuloghoyet," which conforms with Alaska Native Language Center orthography. Noochuloghoyet was originally an Athabaskan locational place-name given to the peninsula created by the confluence of the Tanana and Yukon rivers. The translation is "the point of the big river peninsula" (Jones, 1986:45). Because of the difficulty in pronunciation, historical accounts and map locations have many spelling variations: Nukluroyit,

Nuclavette, Nukluklayet, Nukiukahyet, Nuklukait, Nuklaciya, Nuklukyat, Tuklukyet, and Noukelakayet. The Tozitna River, another prominent locational feature, has many spellings: Tazekaket, Tosechaygut, Tozi, Tozie, Tozekaket, Tozikaiat, Tozeekkaakket, and Tozeechaakket. Other possibly confusing terms include "downriver," which stands for the direction of the current, and "upriver," meaning against the current. Determination of "right" bank and "left" bank is always made as one faces downriver.

Environment

The historic site locations are in a bottomland spruce/poplar forest, part of the Nowitna Lowlands of the greater Yukon River drainage system, as defined by Selkregg (1974). Shoreline and island vegetation consist primarily of spruce trees, with a few poplar trees and an understory including various grasses, aconitum, horsetail, and fireweed. The Yukon River supports several resident fish species, including pike and whitefish, along with major spawning runs of anadromous king, chum, "dog," and silver salmon. This riparian environment is also an area of concentration for a large variety and number of mammals.

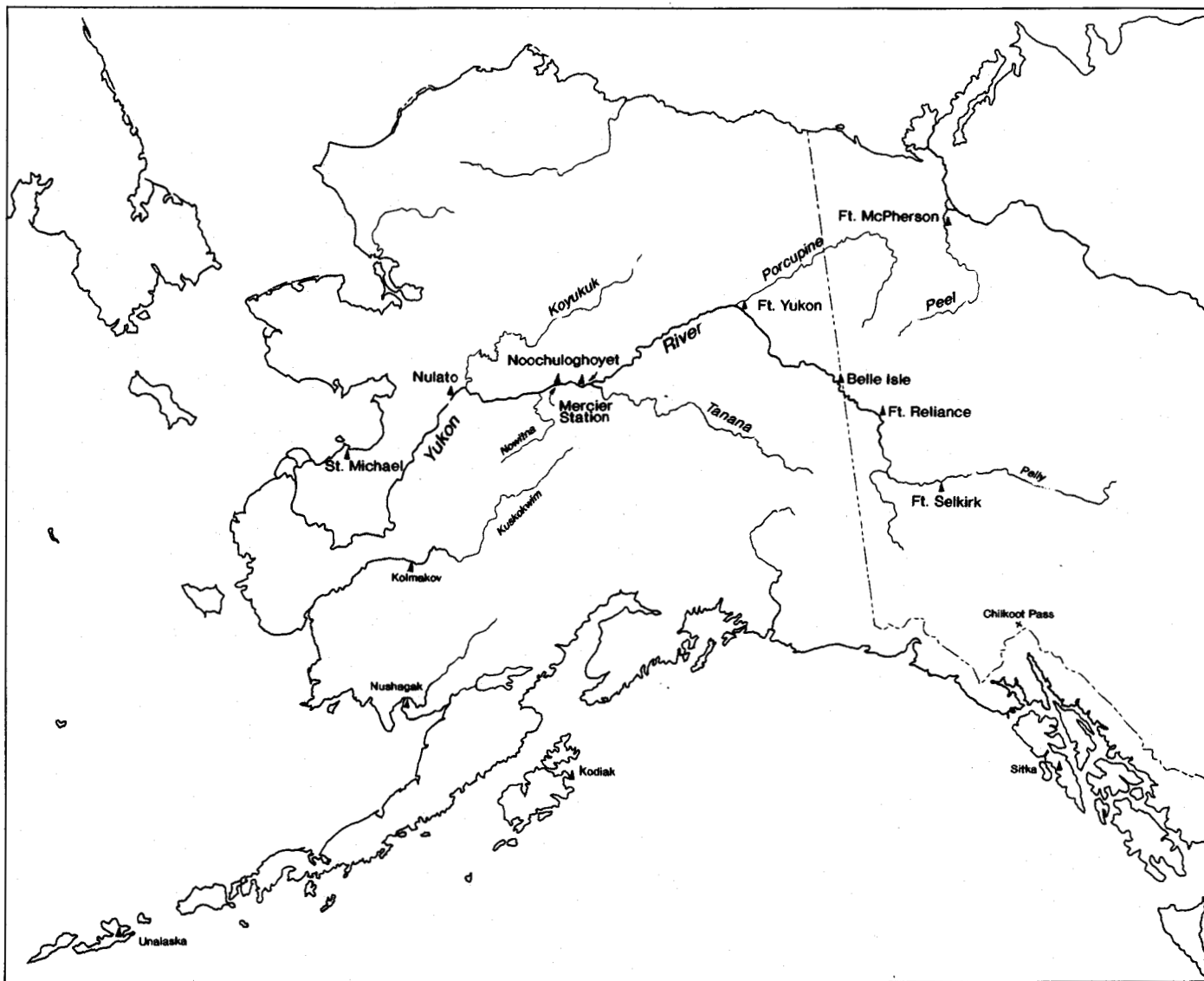


FIG. 1. Locations of trading posts in Alaska and Canada.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE RUSSIAN AND BRITISH PERIOD

During the 1800s, it was less hazardous politically for private companies to claim new territory than sovereign countries. The East India Company acted as the political arm of the British in the East, whereas its counterpart in the New World was the Hudson's Bay Company. The Russian American Company provided a similar vehicle for Russian expansion into North America. The Hudson's Bay Company and the Russian American Company were, thus, not only trading companies, but agents of their respective countries.

After establishing themselves in the Aleutians and on the Alaska Peninsula, the Russians began to push north in 1819. In 1838, starting from St. Michael near the mouth of the Yukon River, Andrei Glazunov explored the lower Yukon, known to the Russians as the Kvikhpak. Petr Malakhov also explored the river in 1838-40, going inland as far as present-day Nulato (Fedorova, 1973). Later, a Russian named Derabin built a post at Nulato; he became the first *bidarshik* (head trader) and called it Fort Derabin. He was killed in the 1851 Nulato massacre. Afterward, the post was rebuilt and named for the nearby Nulato River. In 1842 Lieutenant L.A. Zagoskin traveled up the Yukon to Nulato and the next spring ascended as far as the Nowikaket (Nowitna) River. Turning back at a rapids, he later reported it was impossible for skin boats to travel farther upriver (Dall, 1870:47-52, 276). Captain C.W. Raymond (1900:22) later called this place Halls Rapids

after Captain Benjamin Hall, the first person to traverse the point with a steamship. The Russians established several other permanent posts along the river but none farther east than Nulato.

Agents of the Hudson's Bay Company explored the eastern part of the Yukon Territory. John Bell first made a reconnaissance of the Peel River, then built Fort McPherson in 1840. From there he crossed the mountains to the west, locating the Rat, Porcupine, and Yukon rivers (Murray, 1910:2). In 1847 Alexander Hunter Murray began Fort Yukon, a Hudson's Bay Company trading post, at the junction of the Porcupine and Rat Rivers (in Russian-American territory). The Hudson's Bay Company operated Fort Yukon continuously until 1869 (Murray, 1910; Mercier, 1986:ix).

Noochuloghoyet Point (A) (prehistoric and historic)

Noochuloghoyet Point was a place of neutral ground located on a peninsula formed by the confluence of the Tanana and Yukon rivers several hundred kilometres downriver from Fort Yukon. Originally, this was a place where Indians from different groups met each year to celebrate the change of seasons from winter to spring. Around 1861, the Russians started coming to Noochuloghoyet Point each spring to trade for furs. From Fort Yukon, the Hudson's Bay Company also sent several parties of Indians to trade. In 1862, Hudson's Bay traders traveled down the Yukon as far as the Nowitna River; nevertheless,

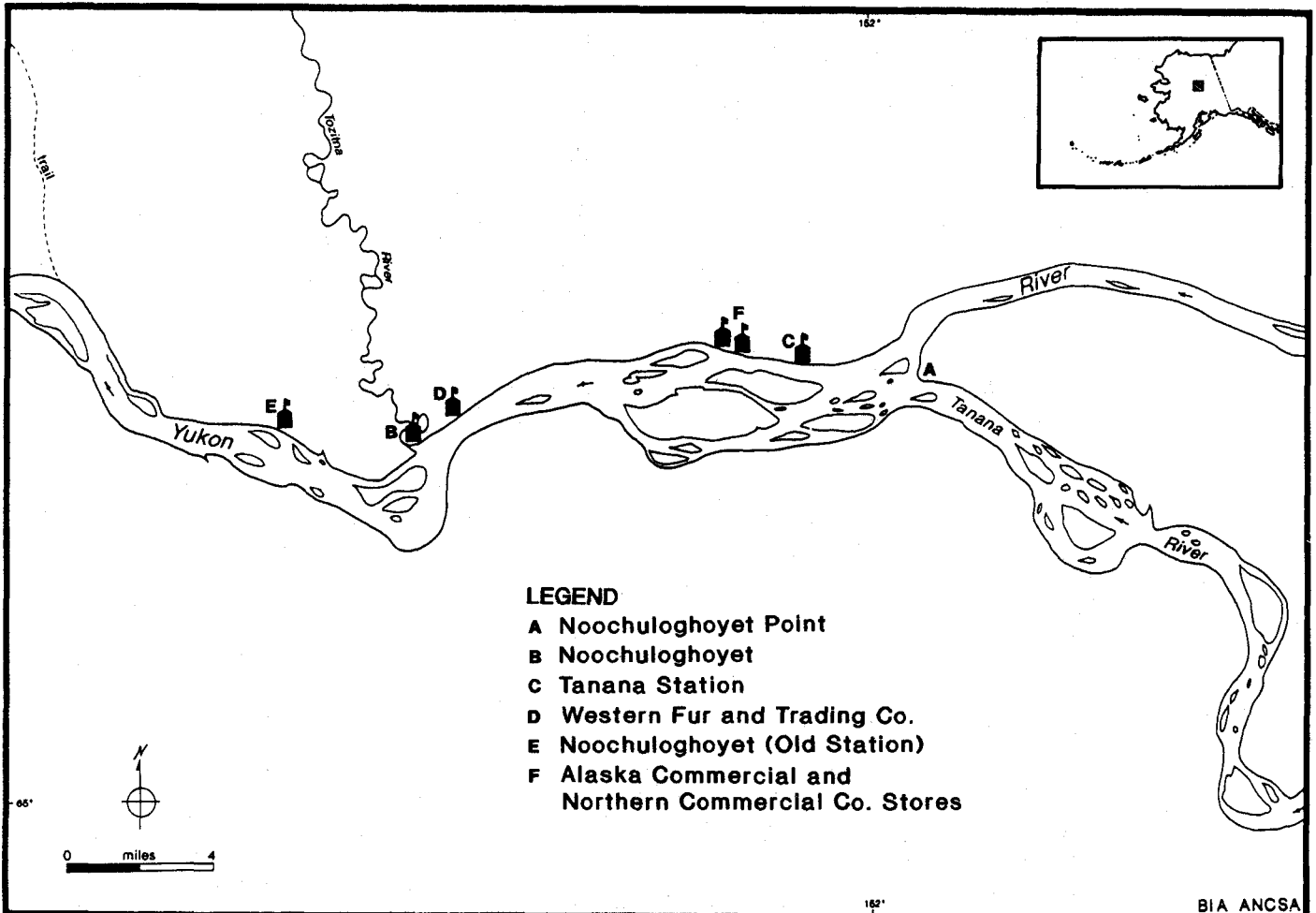


FIG. 2. Spatial locations of trading posts in the region of Noochuloghoyet.

they organized no other posts within Russian-America. The *bidarshik* at St. Michael learned of Fort Yukon from the Indians and became determined to learn more about the fort. In the summer of 1863, he sent a Creole named Ivan Simonson Lukeen to investigate. Lukeen navigated the Yukon River from Nulato east to Fort Yukon, linking the Russian-American and Canadian regions of the Yukon River. Although the Russians learned that Fort Yukon was in their territory, they took no action (Dall, 1870:276). The Yukon River was called the Kivhpak from St. Michael to Noochuloghoyet Point and the Youkon from Noochuloghoyet Point to Fort Yukon (Adams, 1982:133).

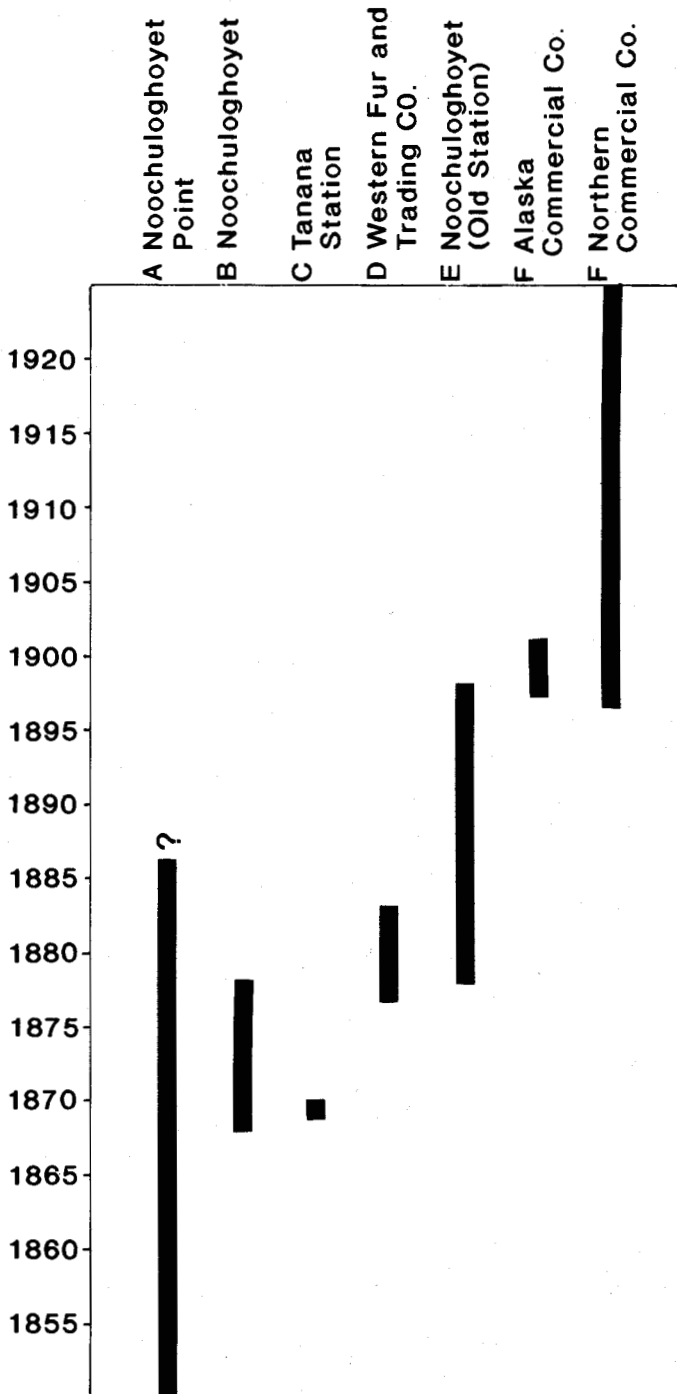


FIG. 3. Chronological time periods for the trading posts.

In 1866, because of difficulties encountered with attempts to lay a trans-Atlantic cable, the Western Union Telegraph Company (WUTC) sought an alternative transcontinental route across Alaska and Asia to Europe. To determine its feasibility, the company sent employees into the Yukon District. The first exploration party included Robert Kennicott (director), Frank Kechum, and Michael Laberge. Kennicott died of an apparent heart attack at Nulato, but Kechum and Laberge continued to carry on the survey work (Dall, 1898). In spring 1866, with Lukeen as a guide, they ascended the Yukon River as far as Fort Yukon; they then returned to Nulato and crossed over to St. Michael by portage. In 1867, Kechum and Laberge surveyed east again as far as Fort Selkirk and then returned to Fort Yukon. Later in the spring, starting from St. Michael, the WUTC scientific researcher William H. Dall and artist Frederick Whympier traveled east to Fort Yukon, where they met Kechum and Laberge. The group then returned to St. Michael (Dall, 1870:277; Dall, 1898).

The succeeding spring the party made a further reconnaissance of the Yukon District, traveling eastward from Nulato to Fort Yukon using a *baidar* (skin boat). They were accompanied by Russian American Company employees, including a trader named Pavloff, as far as Noochuloghoyet Point. The traders were escorting a flotilla of birch bark canoes that contained goods to barter. They sought the yearly harvest of furs brought by Indian tribes (Dall, 1898:91-94; Whympier, 1869:228-230). At the same time, Hudson's Bay Company traders made the trip west from Fort Yukon to Noochuloghoyet Point. Because the Russians, coming east, were delayed by current and ice, many times the "Scotsmen" got there first and purchased the available skins (Raymond, 1900:20). The Russians often had to settle for pelts from later Native arrivals (K. Arndt, pers. comm. 1991). After parting company with the traders at Noochuloghoyet Point, Dall and his party continued on to Fort Yukon. Later, they learned of the successful laying of the trans-Atlantic cable, which stopped the need for further WUTC exploration in Alaska (Dall, 1870:358).

CHRONOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN PERIOD

The sale of Russian-America to the United States in 1867 came shortly after the American Civil War. Because the U.S. government in Washington, D.C., was largely involved with the "reconstruction" of the South, administration of Alaska passed first to the U.S. Army, then to the U.S. Customs Service, and finally to the U.S. Navy. Other than the later discussed mission of Captain Raymond (1900) to dispossess the Hudson's Bay Company of Fort Yukon, these bureaucracies took little political action in the Alaskan interior for the first twenty years. During this period, after several mergers, the Alaska Commercial Company took control of the Nulato, Noochuloghoyet, and Fort Yukon trading posts (Schwatka, 1900; Mercier, 1986). Within part of this period, this company also owned most of the Yukon River steamers and thus became a principal influence on the river because of its ownership of several trading posts and its control of the majority of river traffic.

Noochuloghoyet Trading Post (B) (1868-78)

Fort Yukon was still in operation as a British trading post when Russian-America was sold to the United States in 1867. Two years later, the U.S. government sent Captain C.W. Raymond to determine if Fort Yukon was in Canadian territory

or in Alaska and so infringing on American territory. To make the river journey from St. Michael to Fort Yukon, Raymond used the steamer *Yukon*, belonging to Parrott and Company. *Yukon* became the first steam-powered boat to make the complete trip. Finding the fort to be on the U.S. (Alaska) side of the U.S.-Canadian border, Raymond ordered the Hudson's Bay Company to relinquish it and put Ferdinand Westdahl and Moise Mercier in charge (Raymond, 1900:22-24).

On his way Raymond and his party stopped at a trading post 27 km below Noochuloghoyet Point. This was the original Noochuloghoyet trading post established at the mouth of the Tozitna River the previous year (1868) by François Mercier (Moise Mercier's brother) and other members of the Pioneer Company (Mercier, 1986:11). Raymond (1900:22-24) called this post Fort Adams (Fig. 4) and found "Roberts" (Napoleon Robert) in charge. This location had a good source of fuel. The previous year, Dall (1898:92) noticed a bar obstructing the mouth of the Tozitna River on which lay hundreds of cords of driftwood. The post was taken over by Parrott and Company in 1869, who merged the succeeding year with Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company to become the Alaska Commercial Company.

Alaska Commercial Company records show Napoleon Robert, Alfred Mayo, and Guesler working at Noochuloghoyet in 1874 (Mercier, 1986:xiv, 14). Mayo, Leroy McQuesten, and Arthur Harper acted as independent traders during certain periods. In summer 1874 they bought supplies and trading goods at the Alaska Commercial Company's St. Michael store and returned to Noochuloghoyet Point to trade (Wickersham, 1938:98). Two years later, McQuesten was in charge of Noochuloghoyet, which he called Tanana Station (McQuesten, 1952:6). Around 1878, Noochuloghoyet trading post was moved to a new location 7 km downriver from its original location.

Tanana Station (C) (1869-70)

Shortly after the sale of Russian-America, Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company purchased the holdings of the Russian American Company. They hired former Russian subjects and past members of the telegraph expedition who were already acquainted with the country, thus gaining an early advantage over competitors (Loyens, 1966:109-110). As mentioned previously, Mercier's Pioneer Company activity in Alaska was short lived and Parrott and Company took over operation of

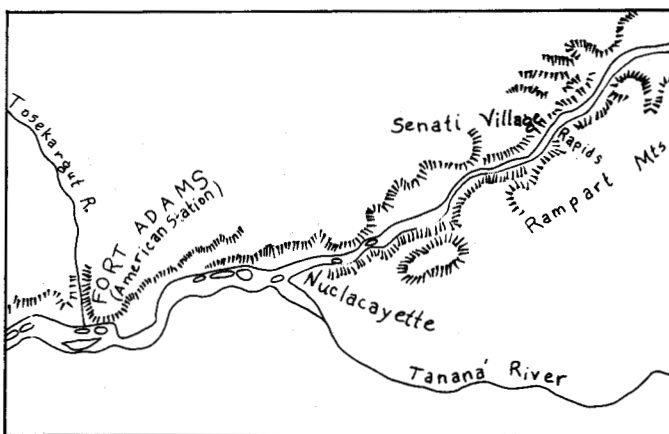
Noochuloghoyet trading post. In 1869, to compete in the lucrative fur trade, Mercier, now working for Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company, founded a second trading post called Tanana Station on the north bank of the Yukon 19 km upriver from the original Noochuloghoyet (Mercier, 1986:5). He was still in charge a year later when Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company merged with Parrott and Company, which amalgamated into the Alaska Commercial Company. After the merger, the company abandoned Tanana Station in favor of the original Noochuloghoyet trading post at the mouth of the Tozitna River. Jette' (1976:140) mistakenly identified Tanana Station as the first Noochuloghoyet trading post.

Western Fur and Trading Company (D) (1877-83)

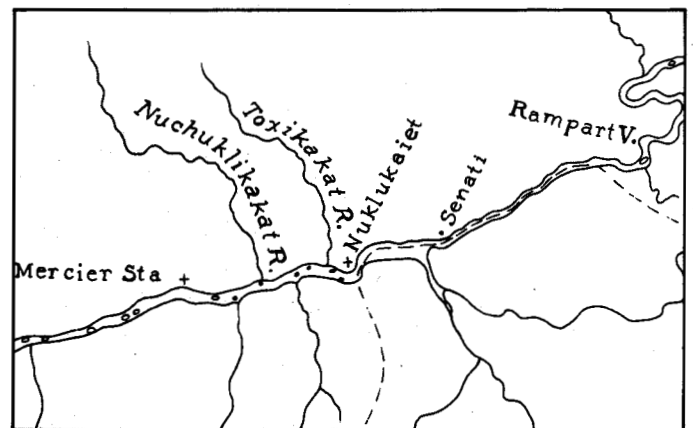
Several years later, Mercier left the Alaska Commercial Company and joined the Western Fur and Trading Company. In 1877, he built a trading post for them, 1.6-2.4 km upriver from the mouth of the Tozitna River, between Noochuloghoyet and the now abandoned Tanana Station. McQuesten (1952:7) said, "another Company came into the country in 1877 and they came as far as Tanana Station. . . ." In spring 1878, Mercier was in charge of this station (McQuesten, 1952:8). Jette' (1976:140) identified this post, between the original Noochuloghoyet trading post and the former Tanana Station, as another location called Noochuloghoyet. Also, Ivan Petrof's 1880 map (Fig. 5) shows Noochuloghoyet there and he recorded a population of 2 whites and 27 Athabaskans (Petrof, 1884:68). Linda Finn Yarborough, Mercier's editor, thought this post may have been Fort Mercier; however, Petrof's map shows Fort Mercier 48 km farther downriver. This station was the best constructed trading post along this section of the Yukon (Mercier, 1986:5, 11).

Noochuloghoyet/Old Station (E) (1878-96)

In 1878, the latest owners of the original Noochuloghoyet trading post, the Alaska Commercial Company, moved to a new trading post 6 km downriver from the mouth of the Tozitna River. Kandik and Mercier's 1880 map (Fig. 6) identified the new location of Noochuloghoyet (Fort Tanana) and also a second, unnamed (Western Fur and Trading Company) trading post. This indicates that different sources identified both the 1878 Alaska Commercial Company trading post and



Raymond 1871
 FIG. 4. Raymond's location of Fort Adams in 1869 (extracted from Reconnaissance of the Yukon River, Alaska, 1871, located at University of Alaska-Fairbanks, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Rare Book Collection).



Petrof 1884
 FIG. 5. The location of Noochuloghoyet and Fort Mercier trading posts in 1880 (extracted from Petrof, 1884).

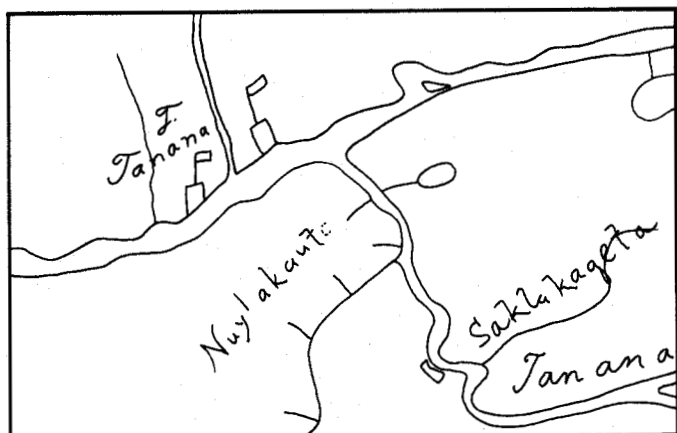
the Western Fur and Trading Company as Noochuloghoyet. Also, Sheldon Jackson's (1906:84) map (Fig. 7) called location E both Noochuloghoyet trading post and Fort Adams. Fort Adams is the name Raymond originally called the post at location B in 1869. This is further inferential evidence that Noochuloghoyet moved from location B to location E.

In 1882, Edward Schieffelin, who earlier made a fortune prospecting at Tombstone, Arizona, brought a group of prospectors and a small single-paddlewheel steamer named *New Racket* to Alaska for the purposes of prospecting along the Yukon (Jacobsen, 1977). At Nulato, they saw the Alaska Commercial Company's post and also the rival trading post of the Western Fur and Trading Company. Jacobsen, a collector for the Berlin Museum, accompanied the group as far as Noochuloghoyet trading post. Along the way, he noticed an epidemic (coughing) in the Native villages they passed and also among the Indians on the steamer *Yukon*. On 27 August 1882, they arrived at Noochuloghoyet, where Alfred Mayo was in charge. Jacobsen said the Natives had very few antiquities to trade and their prices were very high. Because the Western Fur and Trading Company's post was competing with the Alaska Commercial Company's post, the Natives living in this area could get high prices for their furs, almost the equivalent of those in San Francisco. Consequently, neither station showed much in returns (Jacobsen, 1977:99-108). In spring

1883, the Alaska Commercial Company purchased the Western Fur and Trading Company and took over their trading posts (Schwatka, 1900:313; Loyens, 1966:110; Jacobsen, 1977:99). The Western Fur and Trading Company buildings near Noochuloghoyet were either disassembled and transported there or demolished (Mercier, 1986:5, 51). This left just one trading post in the area, called Noochuloghoyet.

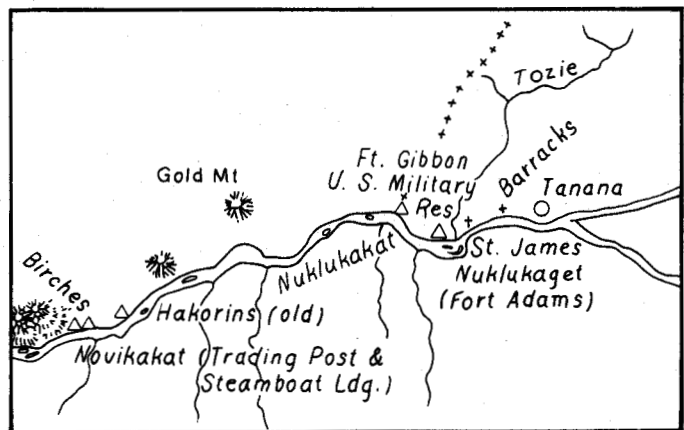
A year later, in 1883, Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka followed the Chilkoot Trail from the Pacific Coast inland to British Columbia and then rafted down the Peely River past the remains of Fort Selkirk (Schwatka, 1900:291-306). In 1851, the Chilkat Indians had burned Fort Selkirk, although they did not harm the Hudson's Bay Company traders at the station (Dall, 1870:507). Schwatka's party then rafted on to the now abandoned Fort Yukon. The Alaska Commercial Company had taken over Fort Yukon after the Hudson's Bay Company left in 1867. Fort Yukon eventually became unprofitable and the Alaska Commercial Company closed the post in 1879 or 1880. The Alaska Commercial Company then established Fort Reliance and Belle Isle, but in turn abandoned them, Fort Reliance because of Indian trouble. Lieutenant Schwatka noticed a crew was removing the logs from Fort Yukon's stockade to use as fuel for their steamer *Yukon* (Schwatka, 1900:306-316).

From Fort Yukon the party rafted through a rapids at Ramparts and then continued on to Noochuloghoyet. Schwatka (1900:350) said Noochuloghoyet trading post was more properly called Tanana Station, "the first name being that of an abandoned post situated a short distance upriver." The new Noochuloghoyet buildings were on high, well-drained ground and Arthur Harper was in charge. A turnip garden with a southern exposure was on the slope immediately adjacent to the main building. At Noochuloghoyet, Schwatka and his crew abandoned the raft. For the journey back to St. Michael, they used a *barka* (small schooner with sails) and took advantage of the prevailing winds, which are the same as the current, east to west (Schwatka, 1900:319-320). The vacant trading post Schwatka referred to was probably the original Noochuloghoyet trading post, although it could have been the Western Fur and Trading Company post. His 1883 map (Fig. 8) shows both the new location for Noochuloghoyet and the abandoned Western Fur and Trading Company post. Noochuloghoyet trading post was now the Alaska Commercial Company's farthest eastern frontier station (Schwatka, 1900:313-315). Hudson



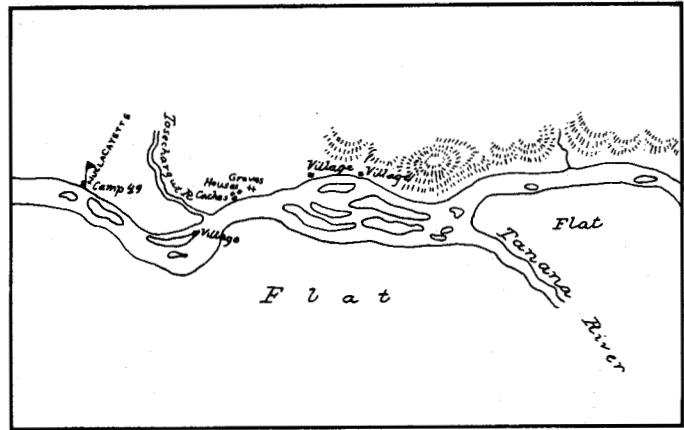
Kandik and Mercier 1880

FIG. 6. Kandik and Mercier's 1880 map of Noochuloghoyet (Fort Tanana) and the Western Fur Company post (from the map collection of the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California).



USGS 1900

FIG. 7. The location of Noochuloghoyet trading post in the mid- to late 1900s (from Jackson, 1906).



Schwatka 1883

FIG. 8. The location of Noochuloghoyet trading post in 1883 (from Schwatka, 1900).

Stuck (1925:152-153) recalled that Noochuloghoyet was the most important trading post on the Yukon River when Lieutenant Schwatka made his trip.

In 1885, Lieutenant Henry T. Allen and company stopped at Noochuloghoyet during a reconnaissance of the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk rivers. They found Andrew Androvsky in charge. Allen mentioned that the steamer *New Racket* was now owned by Harper, McQuesten, and Mayo. And further, Natives from the Tanana and Koyukuk rivers and the village of Fort Yukon arrived in late June for their annual festivities and trading. Lieutenant Allen's report and map (Fig. 9) placed Noochuloghoyet 27 km below the mouth of the Tanana. He also noted a trail running north to Koyukuk River and from there west to the Kobuk River and possible other points (Allen, 1900:452-480).

The Alaska Commercial Company eventually absorbed the smaller companies and ultimately dominated the river traffic, with the few "independent" traders dependent on the company for steamboat transportation from St. Michael (they owned the steamers *Yukon*, *New Racket*, and *St. Michael*). Henry Davis (1967) recalled in September 1888 that a trader named Walker took charge of Noochuloghoyet for the Alaska Commercial Company. Noochuloghoyet was sometimes called Walker's Post between 1888 and 1892. The 1890 census (Porter, 1893) lists 120 people (38 families) and 36 houses at Noochuloghoyet. When Walker left in 1892, Gordon Bettles took charge of the trading post (Davis, 1967:73). A map from around the mid-1890s (Fig. 7) identified this location as Noochuloghoyet and Fort Adams (Jackson, 1905). Around 1896, the Alaska Commercial Company moved the trading post to Tanana Village, 14 km upriver from the mouth of the Tozitna River (Jette, 1976:71; Cantwell, 1904:42).

Alaska Commercial Company Store (1896-1901);

Northern Commercial Company Store (1897-1970s) (F)

After 1892, the Alaska Commercial Company received competition from the Northern Transportation and Trading Company. In 1897 this company set up a store in Tanana Village (Kitchener, 1954:277). J.C. Cantwell (1904:42), who commanded the U.S. Revenue steamer *Nunivak*, reported that both the Alaska Commercial Company and the Northern Commercial Company had stores at Tanana Village by 1900. He also mentioned that in 1898 several vessels had overwintered at the mouth of the Tozitna River and had built cabins to

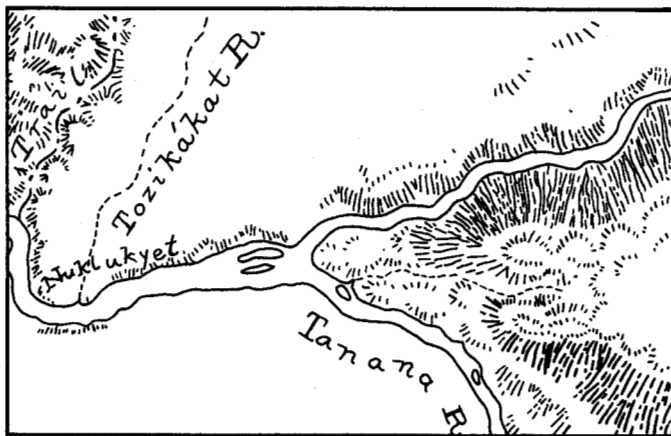


FIG. 9. The location of Noochuloghoyet trading post in 1885 (extracted from Allen, 1900).

accommodate the crew. Two years later he said, "These cabins were still standing but in a dilapidated condition and almost buried under a rank growth of grass and moss" (Cantwell, 1904:42).

Competition increased further when the first reports of gold drew hundreds of miners and prospectors to the Yukon. Cantwell recorded 46 steamers, 10 tugs, and 46 barges operating on the Yukon and in St. Michael harbor by 1900 (Cantwell, 1904:280-281). The Alaska Commercial Company merged with the Northern Commercial Company in 1901. By April, Alaska Commercial Company signs had disappeared from Yukon trading stations to be replaced with "N.N.Co." (Northern Navigation Company for transportation operations) and "N.C.Co." (Northern Commercial Company) for commercial trade.

ETHNOGRAPHIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Besides historical accounts, ethnographic and archaeological evidence associates Old Station village with the last Noochuloghoyet trading post at location E. Koyukon Native elders Joe and Gladys John (1986) visited the village when they were children. They said Harper's store (Noochuloghoyet) ceased operation before their time, but they remembered its remnants in the center of the old village. Old Station is near the mouth of a creek called Dekets' Endekkaayh Denh approximately 6 km downstream from the mouth of the Tozitna River. Native elder David Elia (1986) also recalled the village Old Station and remembered a church on the Yukon upriver above the trading post.

The bearing and the dimensions of the main buildings (Features 32 and 15) recorded in the 1986 ANCSA archaeological investigations site map (Fig. 10) closely match Schwatka's 1883 photograph of Harper's post (Fig. 11). Subsurface testing of Feature 32 discovered charcoal, bone, bottle glass, one cut nail, and charred wood. The surface pedestrian survey also located three diagnostic artifacts. One pre-1930 spent Winchester centerfire cartridge (Bears, 1966:57) was found in Feature 34. A light blue, round trade bead found on the beach in front of the site dates from the 1870s (Ketz, 1983:220). One tan and brown glazed stoneware bottle found in a trash dump just north of Feature 32 was originally manufactured by Henry Kennedy, a Scottish potter who started his works in 1866 (Thorn, 1947:83). Two similar stoneware bottles were unearthed by Oswalt (1980:73) in the ruins of Kolmakowsky Redoubt, a Russian-American trading post on the Kuskokwim River. The stoneware bottle and trade bead represent a span of time from the 1860s to 1900s and fall within the expected time frame of the site.

DISCUSSION

The Russian/British Period

As mentioned previously, the Russian American Company and the Hudson's Bay Company were not only trading companies but also agents of their respective countries. The two trading companies established Nulato (Fort Derabin) and Fort Yukon near major river confluences. These were potentially politically important as strategic locations from which to control river accesses; apparently, nonetheless, their placement was largely an economic choice. Up to this time no one had explored the interior and the companies did not have enough

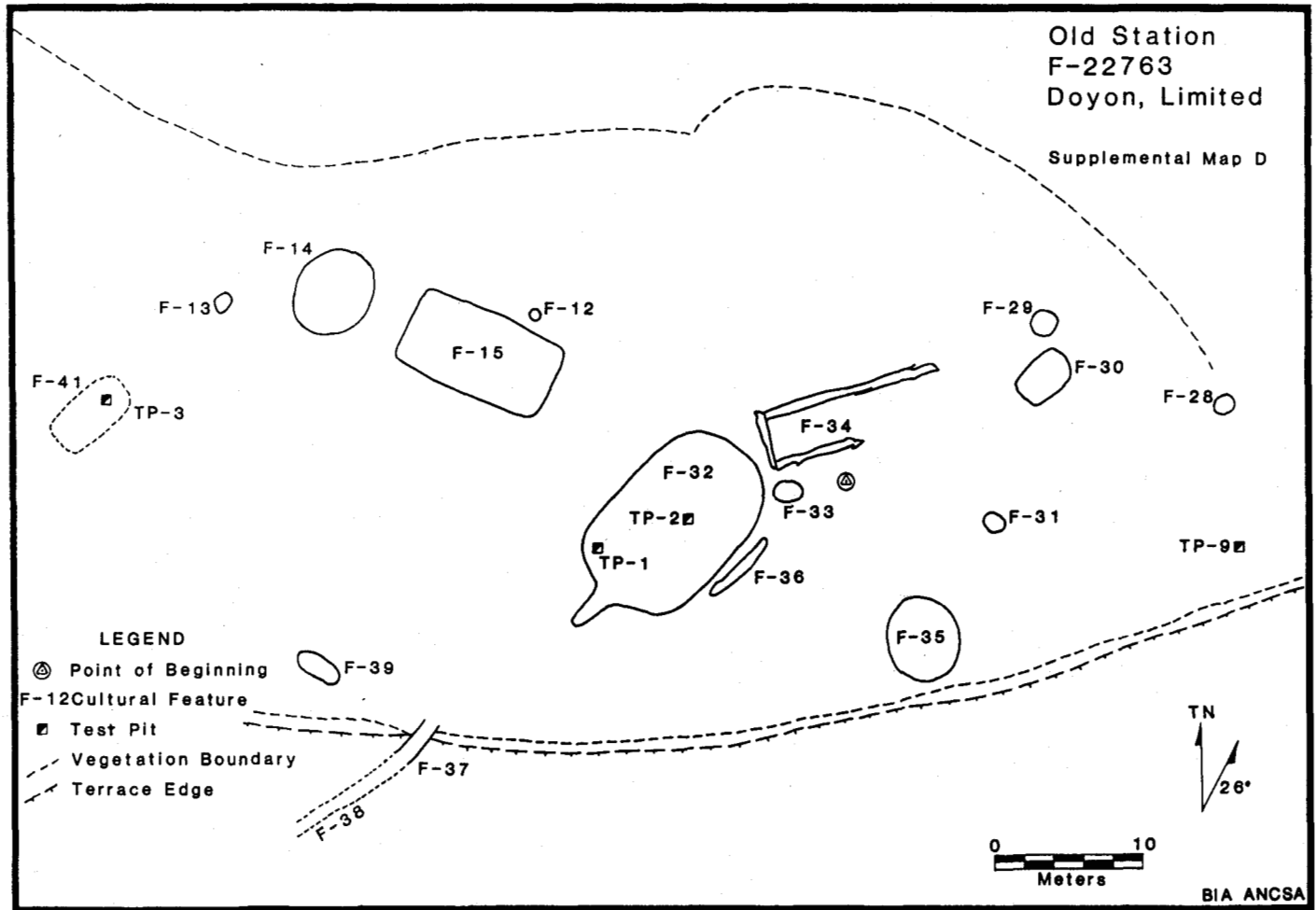


FIG. 10. The 1990 ANCSA site map of Old Station and Noochuloghoyet trading post (extracted from Turck, 1991).

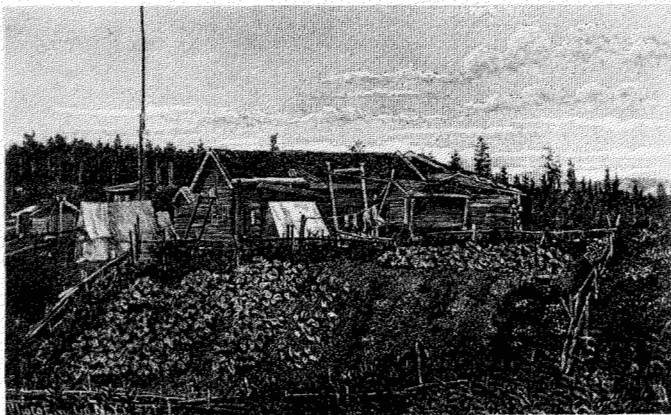


FIG. 11. Schwatka's photograph of Noochuloghoyet trading post in 1883 (photo credit: the Anchorage Museum of History and Art).

regional topographic information to consider many strategic possibilities. Political considerations, however, constrained the Hudson's Bay Company from extending posts any farther west, because Fort Yukon was already in Russian-American territory.

Although economic motives first impelled Russian traders to explore Alaska, economic constraints stopped them from organizing posts farther inland in North America. Due to a

change in fashion and loss of market, the Russian fur business took a downturn in the 1840s, and consequently there was less need to set up more trading posts. In addition, the diminished capital expenditures limited the actual size of the existing posts. Russian and British competition took place on a small scale. The British had established Fort Yukon within the boundary of Russian-America, but quite a distance from the Russian post Nulato. In the spring, trading parties sent by each post traveled to Noochuloghoyet Point to obtain the Natives' pelts; the encroachment of Fort Yukon into Russian territory often allowed the British to arrive first. This was the closest either party came to an active rivalry.

Environmental constraints on the Russians also restricted further inroads into the interior. To provision the existing Russian-American coastal settlements, the supply lines were already stretched to the limit across Siberia and the North Pacific. Logistical problems increased exponentially in proportion to any added distance to this route. A related physical impediment to building stations farther inland was the rapids Zagoskin (1967) reported east of Nulato, which restricted travel upriver. The current and ice from the spring breakup of the Yukon River were a further hinderance to the Russians on their annual inland trip to Noochuloghoyet Point but an aid to the English traders coming west with the current. Rampart rapids might have restricted British settlement between Fort Yukon and Noochuloghoyet Point, but that problem was a

moot point. They were already well into Russian-American territory.

Cultural considerations also influenced the size and placement of trading posts. The population of the interior was small and scattered. The Natives moved from place to place in a series of seasonal rounds, living in temporary camps and villages and utilizing a hunter-gatherer type of environmental adaptation. Consequently, major river confluences became optimal locations for establishing trading posts, because these locations acted as central hubs to the Natives and river traffic of the regions. Noochuloghoyet Point is a good example; the region's Indians chose this location for their annual gathering. The small size and few permanent personnel at the most forward Russian posts, other than garrisoned Redoubts, largely dictated the manner in which Russians related to the local Native populations. At Nulato, even with technological superiority, they were at the mercy of the Indians and consequently did not mistreat them. The Hudson's Bay Company had a similar policy of initially starting a small post with just a few company people in the hopes of not intimidating the local Natives into hostilities (Dall, 1898).

The American Period

Alaska was largely apolitical for several decades after the sale of Russian-America to the United States. Native Americans did not have voting rights and Alaska had an extremely small Euro-American population. Additionally, the focus of the U.S. Congress was on "reconstruction," and the administration of Alaska passed to the military, which lacked both authority and experience in the region. Therefore, American trading companies used criteria other than political considerations to select the locations of trading posts. Certainly, more was known about the Alaskan interior by the time of the American period, when the Pioneer Company started the first new trading post on the Yukon River. Both British and Russian traders had traversed sections of the Yukon River and interacted with the aboriginal inhabitants. Further, the WUTC exploration party had mapped much of the Yukon River and its drainages and also reported on the region's peoples.

In the past, the Russian and British governments had given charter rights to the Russian American Company and the Hudson's Bay Company for regional trade. With the advent of the U.S. purchase of Alaska, absence of governmental control allowed anyone to compete for the Native fur trade. Several entrepreneuring companies attempted to take advantage of the economic opportunities that seemed to present themselves. Some of the beginning companies in the area were small businesses that either failed or merged to form larger ones. For instance, although the Pioneer Company was first in the area, it quickly sold out to Parrott and Company. Shortly afterwards, Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company purchased the holdings of the Russian American Company and began Tanana Station (C) between Noochuloghoyet (B) and Noochuloghoyet Point (Mercier, 1986:5). The evidence suggests that when Parrott and Company and Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company merged shortly afterward to become the Alaska Commercial Company they closed Tanana Station (C) and kept the original post (B), near the mouth of the Tozitna River, open. In later economic competition on the Yukon this spatial pattern of establishing a rival post near an existing one recurs. In 1877, the Western Fur and Trading Company located trading stations near the Alaska Commercial Company posts at both Nulato and

Noochuloghoyet (B). And in 1897, the Northern Commercial Company set up a store near the Alaska Commercial Company (F) at Tanana Village.

Competition was, in any case, of short duration, with the survival of only one major trading company at the outcome. Parrott and Company merged with Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company, the Western Fur and Trading Company was out of business in six years, and the Alaska Commercial Company merged with the Northern Commercial Company. This indicates there was not enough profit for two large trading companies to compete on the river and corroborates Jacobsen's earlier observations.

Placement of trading posts also involved environmental considerations, but technological improvements such as the steamship made logistics and environmental constraints less of a problem. Companies now provisioned posts from San Francisco, so supply lines were shorter both physically and because of improved methods of travel. Further, although Halls Rapids and Ramparts Rapids, downriver and upriver respectively from Noochuloghoyet Point, may initially have been environmental constraints to travel, they caused less difficulty when the steamers became active on the river.

Noochuloghoyet Trading Posts

Two aspects of the history of the Noochuloghoyet trading posts remain problematic. One involves the length of time Noochuloghoyet (B) remained open. This is a two-part problem: first, whether Noochuloghoyet (B) was retained or abandoned after 1870 and, second, if it lasted into the 1870s, when it was moved. The other problem involves the move of Noochuloghoyet (E) to its new location at F.

In 1870, Parrott and Company, the owners of Noochuloghoyet (B), and Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company, who ran Tanana Station (C), merged into the Alaska Commercial Company. Mercier (1986:5) said the company abandoned Tanana Station (C), but only inferential and negative evidence suggests the new company retained the original Noochuloghoyet trading post (B) after 1870 instead of starting in a new location. To begin, no reference to building a new trading post exists, and it makes economic sense in a merger to abandon one post and retain the more profitable one. The Pioneer Company had established the post at the mouth of the Tozitna River at a location near the Yukon and Tanana rivers' junction. The company had a choice of locations, but Mercier and his partners selected Noochuloghoyet (B), near a major river confluence. This location was an excellent choice from an economic standpoint because of its proximity to an established trading area where Indians gathered. In addition, economic competition was minimal due to the absence of the Russians and the tenuous situation of the British at Fort Yukon.

Besides profit, other determinants affected this choice. Location B, at the mouth of the Tozitna River, had several environmental advantages. For instance, Dall (1898:92) noticed that this location had a good supply of driftwood for fuel. In addition, the bar at the river mouth sheltered the shoreline, making it an excellent place for overwintering small steamboats (Cantwell, 1904:42).

The second part of the problem is what year and for what reason Noochuloghoyet (B) moved to location E. If the hypothesis that Noochuloghoyet (B) remained open into the 1870s and was vacated before 1883 is accepted, a realistic date for abandonment is needed. The authors give the year 1878 as an

approximate date for the move from location B to location E. This estimation revolves around historical maps and census figures. Kandik and Mercier's 1880 map shows an unnamed trading post (D) and another called Fort Tanana (E), one on either side of the Tozitna River. Another source is Petrof's 1880 census, which reveals a trading post labeled Noochuloghoyet corresponding to the Western Fur and Trading Company trading post (D). He shows no post at the other location. Several scholars, however, have been critical of the accuracy of Petrof's census work (Loyens, 1966).

Essentially, Petrof appears to have combined the two population centers into one. He may have followed any number of lines of reasoning to arrive at this conclusion. One possibility is that he mistakenly thought there was one large village with peripheral populations. If the original Noochuloghoyet trading post had recently moved downriver, it may not yet have attracted a support population large enough for Petrof to have considered it a separate whole. He may therefore have logically assumed that the Western Fur and Trading Company post (D) was Noochuloghoyet, rather than the Alaska Commercial Company post (E), since the established name in the area was Noochuloghoyet. Looking at the two 1880 sources, one notes two posts but cannot name one, and the other mentions the name Noochuloghoyet but misidentifies the post. This naming uncertainty and inconsistency, plus perhaps a lack of population, indicate that Noochuloghoyet (E) was probably in place only a short time, making 1878 a reasonable choice for the year Noochuloghoyet (B) moved downstream.

Environmental reasons may have influenced the move as well as the disposition of the buildings. The Tozitna River may have changed course and threatened to erode the surrounding landscape. Or the inhabitants may have exhausted the area's trees and driftwood used for firewood. If the trading post structures were in a state of decay at the time of the move, they were probably abandoned and later either demolished or used for firewood. People, however, often reused structures. If the buildings were sound, the preferable choice of a new location was downriver, because it would be easier to float the logs from the dismantled buildings downstream with the current.

This relocation could also have cultural explanations. During this period, epidemics decimated Native villages on the river and may have incidentally caused the movement of the post. De Laguna (1947:85) wrote that many times the Natives moved a whole village downriver after a catastrophe or epidemic. Indeed, the Natives considered it dangerous for anyone to travel upriver from a village in which deaths occurred. One or more of these pandemics could have struck and devastated the Natives living around Noochuloghoyet trading post (B). Then, following cultural beliefs and superstitions, the survivors would have vacated the village and moved downriver. The trading post may have followed because of its symbiotic relationship with the village, and the vacated trading station then been moved, demolished, or burned for health reasons. Athabaskan Native elders Josephine Roberts (1986) and Gladys John (1986) reported that Natives often burned down abandoned buildings because of superstitions.

A second inconsistency in the data exists for the last move of Noochuloghoyet trading post from Old Station at location E to Tanana Village at location F. Evidence from some sources suggests the move was in the late 1890s, while Jette' listed 1908 as the year Noochuloghoyet was relocated (de Laguna, 1947:40). Cantwell (1904:42), nevertheless, noticed an Alaska Commercial Company trading post at Tanana Village by 1900.

Further, the Alaska Commercial Company was out of business by 1901 (Loyens, 1966). The map in Jackson's (1906:84) publication, the last reference to Noochuloghoyet (E), was probably drafted several years earlier. The authors were unable to discover any other references to Noochuloghoyet after the late 1890s; therefore, the weight of the evidence is with an earlier move of around the mid- to late 1890s. Stuck (1988:150, 337) does mention both stopping at and passing "Old Station" during his travels early in this century in the Alaskan interior; however, he treats it as a recognized location rather than a habitation area. After the move from E to F the era of trading posts called Noochuloghoyet was over.

With time, first the fur industry and then gold mining ebbed on the Yukon and the major economic pulse for the region shifted south to Fairbanks, which was experiencing a major boom due to the gold rush. Tanana, Nulato, and Fort Yukon, though, continued to survive as small population centers. Tanana, in fact, owing to its position at the confluence of major rivers and its proximity to Fairbanks, continued to prosper until the advent of the railroad. According to Stuck (1988:151), this was the location of most passenger and freight traffic transshipments. Major river confluences first attracted trading companies and later permanent populations; these patterns continue to this day on the Yukon River.

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