

the facts will lead to better understanding not only of what happened, but of how it happened and of the difficulties and responsibilities involved in interpreting events of the past. This book shows, in myriad ways, that history is more than riffling through old papers.

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*North to Alaska! Fifty Years on the World's Most Remarkable Highway*, by Ken Coates. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991. 304 pp. Illus., maps. \$34.95 cloth.

On 20 November 1942, a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony took place at Soldier's Summit above Kluane Lake, Yukon Territory. The thermometer showed  $-30^{\circ}$  F when, under a thin winter sun, Alaska's acting governor, E. L. "Bob" Bartlett, representing the United States, and Ian Mackenzie, representing Canada, each held one blade of a pair of gold scissors and cut the red, white, and blue silk ribbon which officially opened the Alcan Highway (Alaska-Canada Military Highway) to military traffic. Shortly thereafter, the first truck convoy, dubbed the "Fairbanks Freight," rolled north to that city.

This was the culmination of a hectic construction season which began when President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved a recommendation by his Secretaries of the Army and Navy and the Department of the Interior to build a highway linking already established military airfields along the route. It also would provide an alternative supply route to Alaska supplementing sea and air transportation.

Work started on a pioneer road from Dawson Creek, B.C. to Big Delta, Alaska. The U.S. Army Engineers were in charge of building the pioneer road, while the Public Roads Administration (PRA) simultaneously constructed a permanent finished highway. An intergovernmental agreement determined the general location of the highway which would connect American railroads in the Chicago area to the Canadian highway and railroad systems. These, in turn, would reach the southern end of the Alcan Highway.

Seven engineering regiments, aided by forty-seven contractors employed by the PRA, worked toward each other from various points along the route. They laboured under often harsh weather conditions and over extremely difficult terrain, yet finished the pioneer road nine months and six days after the start of construction.

The initial agreement between the U.S. Army Engineers and the PRA in April 1942 had called for a two-lane highway equalling standards for

contiguous U.S. park and mountain roads, including a thirty-six-foot-wide roadbed, finished with 118 inches of gravel or crushed rock, and a 2-inch bituminous surface was to control dust. Bridges were to be timber trestle construction capable of carrying thirty tons, while future plans called for twenty-four-foot-wide steel bridges carrying forty tons.

With the threat of a Japanese invasion receding in 1943, the pressure to rapidly complete the highway was gone. The road was to be cheaper than originally planned, with a roadbed of only twenty-six feet, with surfacing material placed on the road to a width of twenty to twenty-two feet, and no bituminous top. New bridges were to be two-lane and could not exceed twenty-four feet in width. The permanent road was to be completed by December 31, 1943.

In short, the construction of the Alcan Highway represented a gigantic effort. Strung out along 1,470 miles, the engineers and contractors built 133 bridges and installed an average of six culverts per mile for a total of 8,000. The War Department spent \$19,744,585 for the pioneer road of which \$9,547,826 paid for troop supplies, \$489,213 went for the Gulkana-Slana cut-off, \$1,254,211 for temporary bridges, and only \$8,453,335 for the actual construction. By 1945, the PRA had spent a total of \$123,093,443 for the 1,470-mile Alcan Highway, at an average cost of \$83,312 per mile. In April 1946, Royal Canadian Army officials took over the main stretch of the Alaska Highway, as it now was called, the 1,220 or so miles from Dawson Creek to the Alaska border.

Author Ken Coates, vice-president of the University of Northern British Columbia, is eminently qualified to write the story of the Alaska Highway, in part because his own life was so tied up with it. In 1964, his father Richard K. Coates, a civil engineer, transferred from Revelstoke, B.C. to Whitehorse, Y.T. to work for the Department of Public Works on the reconstruction of the Alaska Highway. At age seven, Ken Coates moved to Whitehorse where he went to school. He worked along the Yukon portions of the highway for three summers following high school. In 1974, his father was transferred, over his protest, to the Vancouver office of Public Works Canada, and Ken Coates worked his last summer on the highway in 1975. His fascination with the north, however, has continued to this day.

The volume is based on Canadian and American federal archives, newspapers, secondary accounts as well as memoirs of participants. The volume contains seven chapters. In the first, the author acquaints the reader with the various schemes before 1942 to connect the northwest with the rest of the country. In fact, these went back to the late nineteenth century to the Klondike Gold Rush. By the 1920s, planners considered two alternatives:

Route A running just east of the Alaska Panhandle and passing through the coastal mountain ranges; and Route B which ran roughly north from Prince George, B.C. to Dawson City, Y.T. and from there on to Alaska. Finally, Edmonton, Alberta led a lobbying effort demanding that any road to Alaska pass through the northern plains. The U.S. Army built along this Route C.

In what must be typically Canadian paranoia about American intentions he calls his second chapter "The Invasion of the North." There were no American intentions to grab the Canadian northwest, in fact, the American executive and legislative branches had not figured out what to do with Alaska, America's subarctic subcontinent.

Coates deftly treats the unstable and seasonal white society of the northwest and the stable Native population in the pre-1942 days. The war and the associated construction forever changed both of these societies. The reminiscences of individuals, both male and female, who worked on the highway lend colour and enliven the author's narrative. And while construction work offered opportunities to the Natives, the arrival of so many troops and civilian workers also brought disease and disrupted long-established lifestyles. In short, the construction of the Alaska Highway ranks as one of the engineering feats of the twentieth century. It also changed the Northwest forever. Chapter 4 tells of the efforts of the U.S. Army Engineers, while Chapter 5 tells the story of the PRA construction labours. Chapter 6 deals with the transfer of the Alaska Highway to Canada and the maintenance problems, while the last chapter brings the story to the present.

Coates is a good story teller; the narrative flows smoothly and holds the reader's attention. The volume is illustrated with 101 black-and-white photographs, some of which appear to be poorly reproduced, as well as an excellent map. This reviewer has a few criticisms of an otherwise excellent volume and a significant contribution to northern history. The author has a habit of using the passive tense and of featuring individuals who are not introduced to the reader. A few examples will suffice. Harry George appears on p. 110 and is identified on p. 199. We never find out who F. Rainey is (p. 110), Mildred Spence (p. 121), Rusty Johnson (p. 105), or Bob E. Bartlett (p. 132). Why does it surprise the author that Alaska authorities were reluctant to change the territory's hunting regulations to accommodate the troops (p. 123), and combined American and Canadian forces defeated the Japanese only on Attu, while the enemy successfully evacuated Kiska. And while the official notes of July 19, 1943 stated that the Alaska

Highway began at Dawson Creek and ended at Fairbanks, it never went beyond Big Delta, because from there the Richardson Highway, begun in 1905, connected Fairbanks (p. 149).

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*Salmon Canneries: British Columbia North Coast*, by Gladys Young Blyth.  
Lantzville: Oolichan Books, 1991. 180 pp. Illus. \$19.95 paper.

There is only one way of summarizing this local history of the salmon canneries that were so central a feature of the Naas and Skeena River systems: a labour of love. Gladys Young Blyth grew up in Bella Coola and worked at Namu Cannery. For many years Namu was the largest cannery on the central coast. In 1940 Gladys met her husband, and they moved to Prince Rupert, where her involvement with the canning industry continued. I had an opportunity to travel to the north coast in the late spring of 1982 as part of the Fish and Ships Research Project sponsored by the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at The University of British Columbia. Gladys gave us a tour of the North Pacific Cannery Village Museum located in nearby Port Edwards. As curator of the museum, her love of the industry was evident in the breadth of her knowledge and in the care she took in collecting and displaying artefacts connected with the fishing industry.

What comes through in *Salmon Canneries: British Columbia North Coast* is the vibrancy of the industry beginning with the construction of the first salmon cannery north of the Fraser River in the late 1870s and named Inverness (Alexander Ewen is credited with having built, in 1870, the first salmon cannery in British Columbia: Annieville on the Fraser River). Gladys provides a profile of thirty-eight canneries, including dates of construction and operation; owners; where available, survey maps that illustrate the layout of the buildings; and a wealth of photographs culled from archives throughout the province. The growth of the industry hinged on being able to build a cannery on a site where salmon came to spawn in great numbers. This was especially important in the years before gas-powered engines made the fishing fleet more mobile. It was also important in the years before refrigeration techniques could be developed to preserve the catches. The height of the salmon runs corresponded with the warmest days of summer and thus the fish spoiled quickly unless it was processed immediately. The technique of canning proved especially effective and