

The Yukon Telegraph Line In the Regional District of Kitimat Stikine

The Yukon Telegraph Line was an overland telegraph that was operated by the Dominion Government of Canada from 1901 to 1936. It was constructed in part due to the demand for telegraph service to the Yukon as a result of the Klondike Gold Rush that started a few years earlier. Telegraph service already existed up to Hazelton prior to the Yukon Telegraph as a result of the building of the Collin's Overland Telegraph in 1866. The Collin's Overland was a telegraph being built by the Western Union Telegraph that planned to go link Europe by telegraph via the Bering Strait and Russia. However construction was halted just north of Hazelton when the transatlantic telegraph cable was successfully laid.



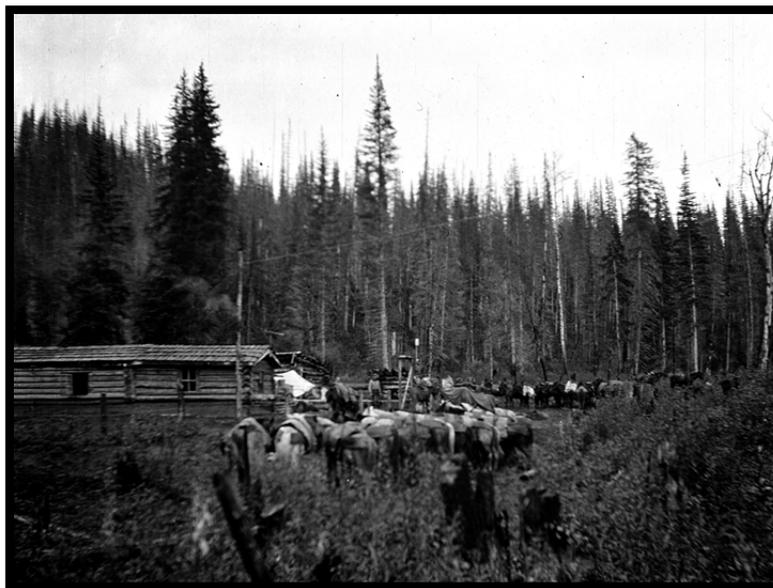
Yukon Telegraph Cabin No. 1 in the Kispiox Valley near Cullon Creek c. 1911
(Royal BC Museum Archives Photo # a-05353)

The Dominion Government of Canada began construction of the Yukon Telegraph in 1899/1900 north of Hazelton following a combination of old Collin's Overland surveys, the existing trails used by local First Nations and trails used by those who recently traveled north to the Klondike on what was termed the All-Canadian route or the Ashcroft Trail. (A route starting in Ashcroft, B.C. on the Canadian Pacific Railway, following the Cariboo Road to Quesnel then across country to Hazelton and north through Telegraph Creek on to the Yukon) Compared to the areas to the south the country north of Hazelton was undeveloped, rugged and remote. Right of way had to be cleared, poles placed in the ground (or trees topped for use as poles) cabins built, river crossings constructed. When the telegraph started operation in 1901 the company stationed one lineman and one operator, at each station cabin along the route approximately every 20-30 miles to maintain the line and keep it operational.



Yukon Telegraph Cabin No.5 in 1913 located in the pass between Slamgeesh and Damdochax Creeks
(Royal BC Museum Archives Photo # b-01323)

North of Hazelton the main cabins or stations, where the men lived, were numbered 1 to 9. Beyond Ninth Cabin the stations were not numbered but named, usually by the geographic feature nearest them, such as Echo Lake or Iskut River. The records of duties of two men stationed at Eighth Cabin, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, were found in the 1970s by two men who landed at the cabin in a helicopter. These records were brought out and donated to the Bulkley Valley Museum. These written records give insight to the lives of the telegraph lineman. They are records of the routine nature of the job but occasionally record the challenges and dangers these men endured to keep the line in operation. Read more about the men of Eighth Cabin.



A Pack Train at Telegraph Cabin No. 4 on the upper Skeena c. 1911 (Royal BC Museum Archives #A-05356)

In January 2010 the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine formally recognized the Yukon Telegraph Line and Trail by adding it to its Community Heritage Registry.