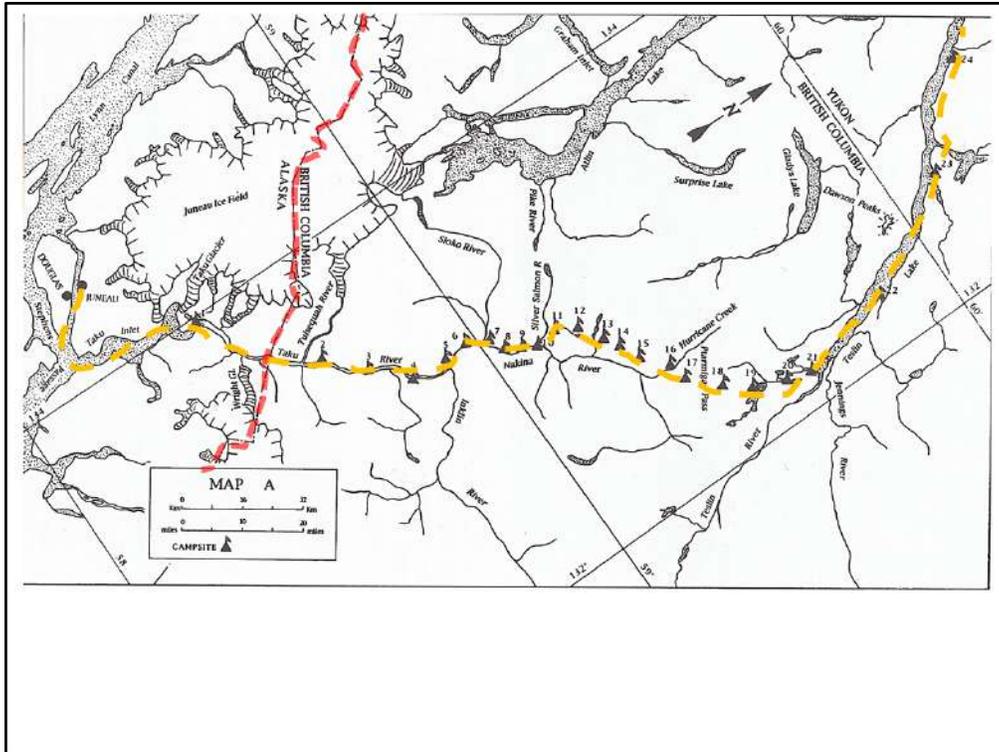
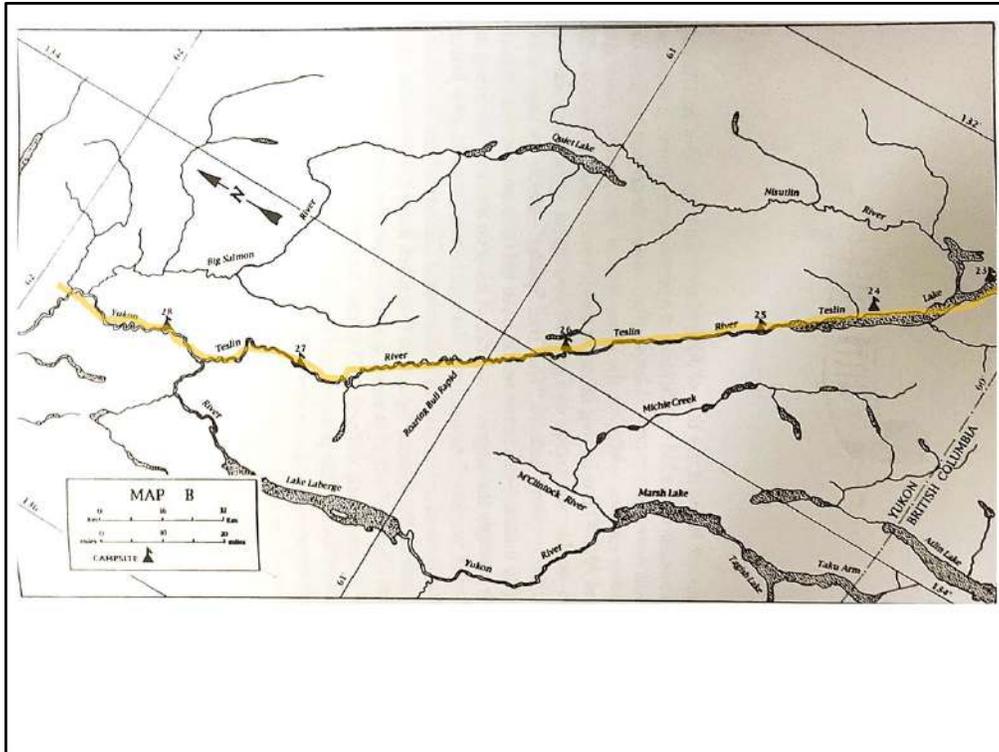


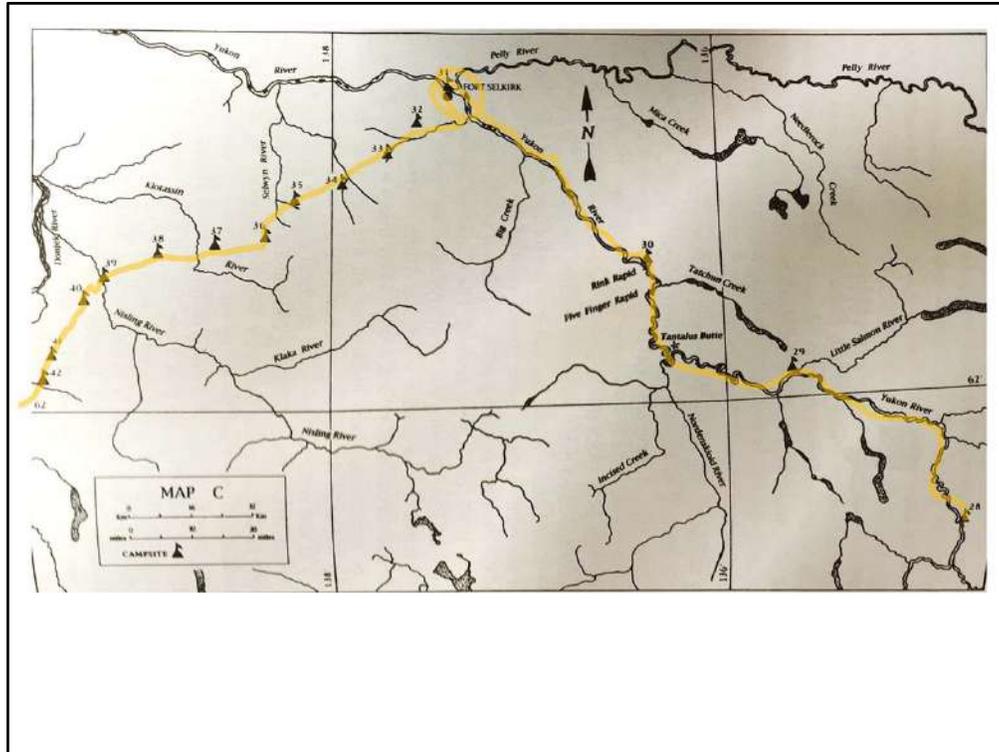
Their trip has to be covered by a combination of U.S. and Canadian topographical maps totalling 5, of which roughly 40 percent coverage was in the Territory of Alaska and 60 percent in Canada. They made 65 overnight camping stops (48, or 74 per cent of which were on the Canadian side of the Alaska-Canada border as demarcated today).



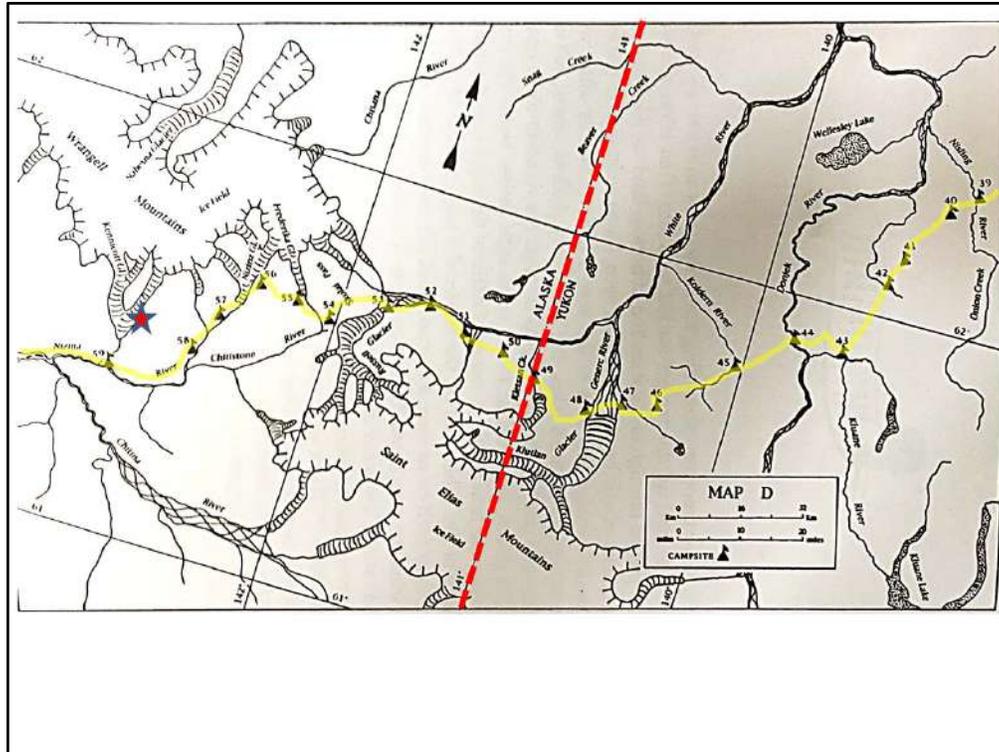
Ascending the Taku River, they made a single overnight camp before reaching slower going on their ascent to Ptarmigan Pass in what is now British Columbia. No doubt Schwatka began to lose some body mass as he hiked along with the packing crew.



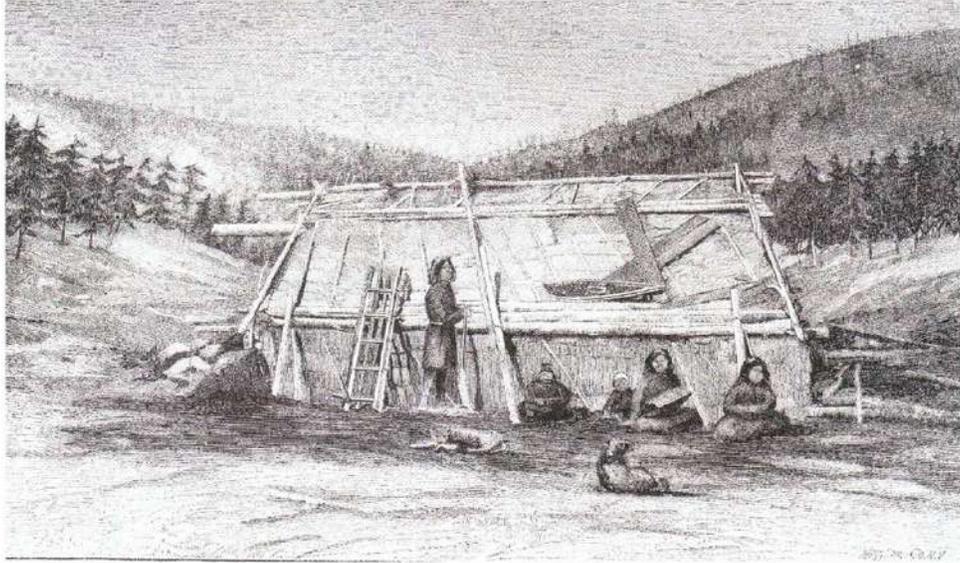
Once they reached Teslin Lake, they could deploy their folding canvas boats, and paddle or sail at a much faster clip northwestward on Teslin Lake to the Teslin River, and into the Yukon River itself just downstream of Lake Laberge.



Then they progressed fast down the Yukon to its tributary the Pelly River where they planned to rest, recruit new guides from inland river communities, and the area surrounding the former post of Fort Selkirk. After a stopover of about 12 days, their supplies and manpower of packers and guides restored, the expedition then headed southwestward. Lured onward, as in other expeditions, by accounts of copper and gold nuggets lying on the surfaces of high mountainous passes and alongside glacier-fed streams in the St. Elias and Wrangell mountains, the group slogged on. They left the Yukon River for the Donjek, Koidern and White Rivers and their headwaters near the passes on the U.S. side of 141° W. Schwatka had named a sizable Yukon lake for his sister's alma mater, Wellesley College. In about 17 days of short, sometimes steep and back-tracked climbs...



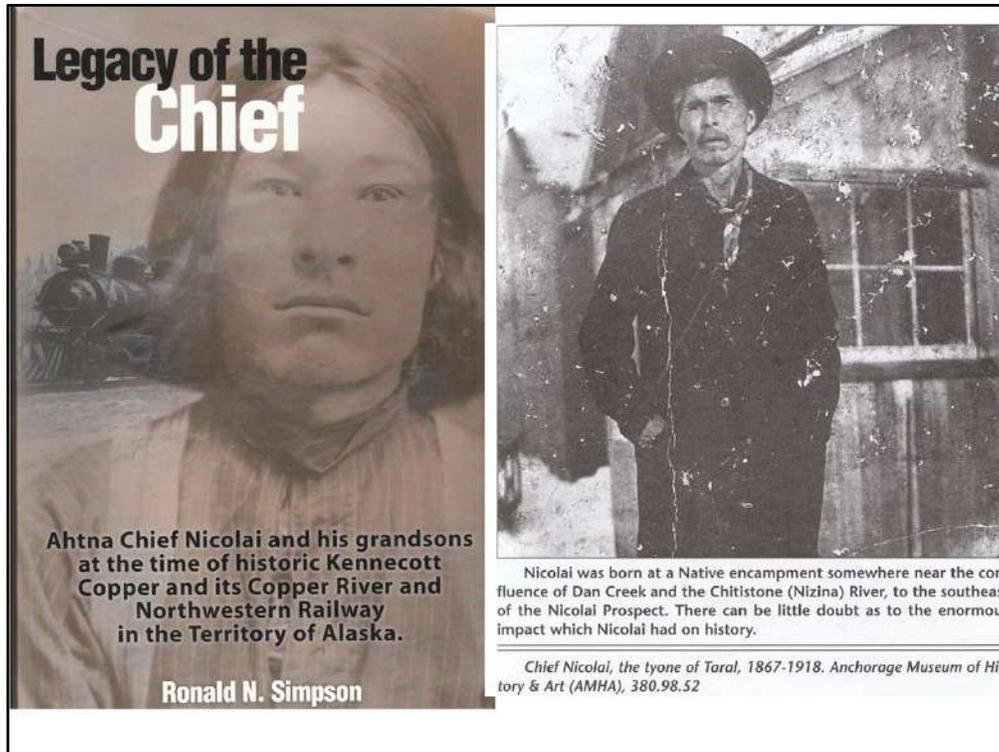
...they reached the area near Skolai Pass, where the drainages began heading toward the Pacific rather than toward the Bering Sea. In another 6 sleeps, they were approaching what would later be named the Kennicott Glacier. They stopped for 2 extra nights to build a boat out of wood and canvas, cover it with pitch, and hope that it would allow them to navigate through terrifying canyons with standing waves and whitewater whirlpools that threatened their lives along the Nizina River above its confluence with the Chitina River. Hayes of the U.S.G.S. was entranced by the colored rock outcrops in this part of the trip, and commented upon the good mineral indications for profitable mines.



The Native village of Tarai in the Copper River drainage as seen by Allen in 1885.

At length, the crew reached Taral at the confluence of the Chitina and Copper Rivers, where the chief (Tyrone) of the community was the legendary Nicolai (sometimes spelled Nikolai). He looked after people who were low on food supplies, and Schwatka and the group's packers and guides were treated to bacon and salmon as they rested and prepared to descend the lower Copper River in the direction of Alaganik, in the company of Nicolai and some of his people aiming to trade at Alaganik, Eyak, and maybe even Nuchek.

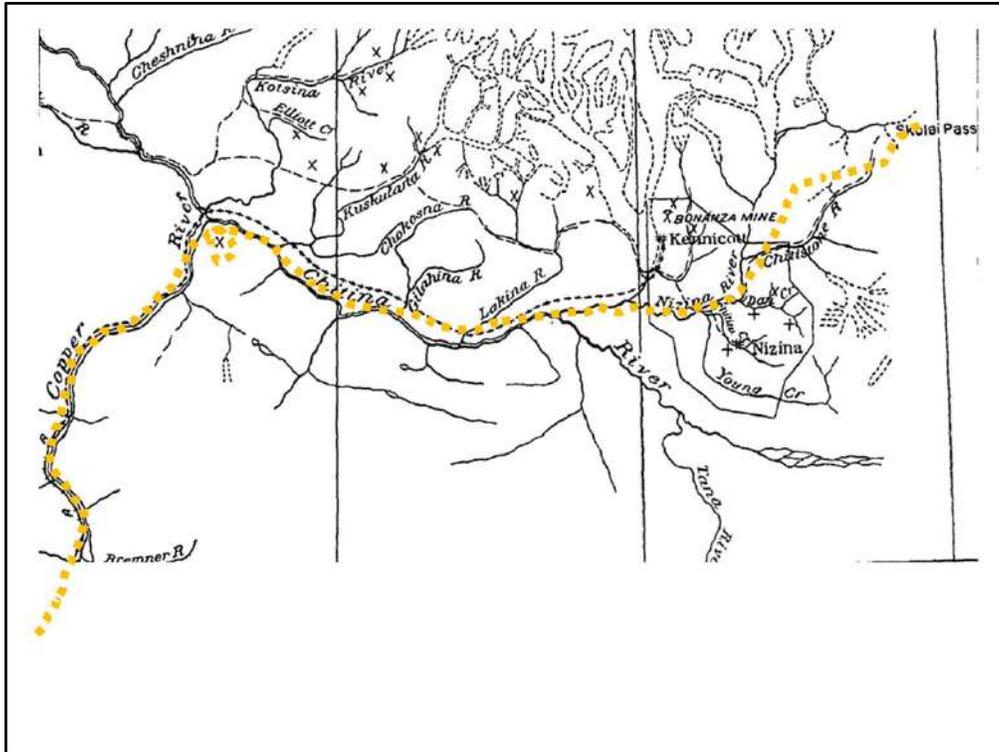
It proved impossible to make Nicolai believe that they had actually floated through the worst canyons and rapids on the Nizina River in the homemade boat that they showed him. As with guides who accompanied Glave and Dalton on their canoe trip down the Alsek River one year earlier, there was simple disbelief about the capabilities of white men to survive such improbable challenges without having grown up in this country.



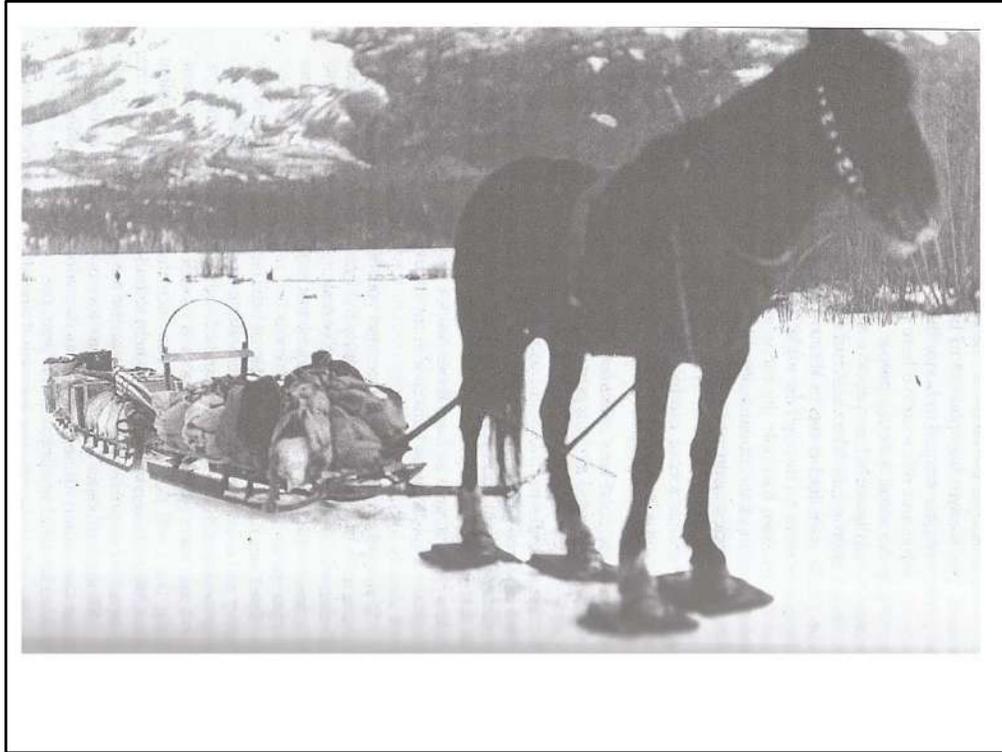
Here's an interesting book, written by a descendant of Chief (Tyone) Nicolai.

It traces the history of the Kennecott [sic] Copper mines from an Ahtna point of view. That view expresses the belief that white men cannot live the full life of peoples native to the land. In other words, they will come, plunder, live here for a while, then leave again. In particular, the well-known copper nuggets country may sustain white men's interests for a few years, but they will soon deplete the resource and leave, thoroughly disillusioned and defeated by the country where the Ahtna people live.

On the right, is the only photograph that Ron Simpson's (2001) book provides of Nicolai himself, who may have been born in 1867, and almost certainly died in 1918.



Here is an outline map of the reported surface outcrops of malachite and other copper ores between the confluence of the Chitina and Copper Rivers at Taral, overlain by the transportation system (Copper River and Northwest Railway, CR & NW, nicknamed the Can't Run & Never Will), overlain in yellow dashed line representing the Schwatka-Hayes route from Skolai Pass through this Copper Country in 1891.



Some of you may remember my picture of Jack Dalton teaching one of his pack horses to walk on snowshoes that he fashioned for deep snows going over the passes from Haines, Alaska, to the Interior, in 1891. Well, here's a freight sled pulled by a horse on snowshoes somewhere along the eventual route of the CR& NW Railway before it was built in 1910-12.

