

Nome-Teller Road

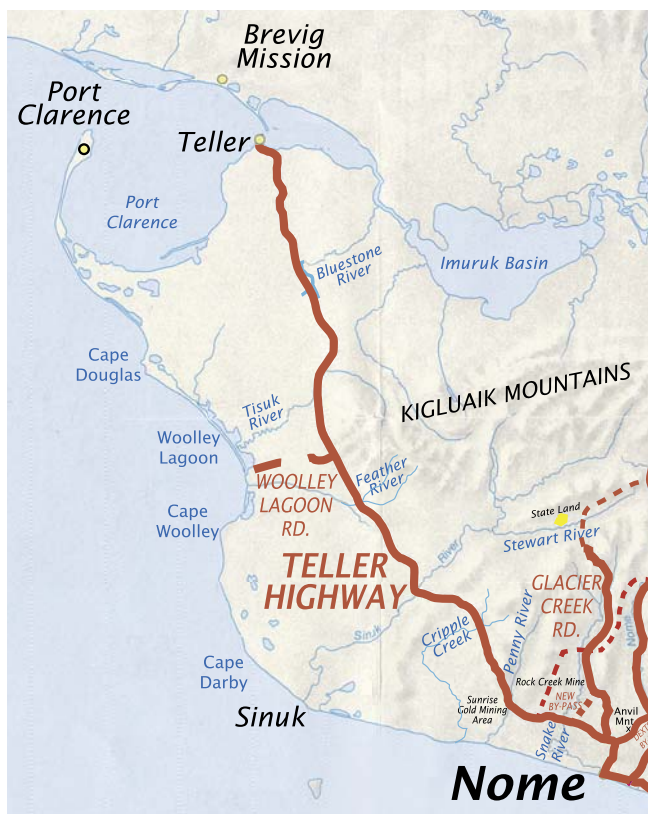
“The Bob Blodgett Nome-Teller Highway”

Facility Characteristics

This 73 mile long highway is gravel and is in better shape than the Kougarok, but needs work. Between miles 4.5 and 72, three road improvement projects have been nominated in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for fiscal years 2006-2009.^{xx}

Physical and Community Context

The Teller Highway travels from Nome inland off the Bering Sea, roughly parallel with the coastline. It skirts the western edge of the scenic Kigluaik Mountains, ending at Port Clarence and Grantly Harbor. It provides



The Teller Road is 73 miles long and serves a year-round population base of five hundred



The scenic Kigluaik Mountains and the Teller Highway in June

coastal access at Woolley Lagoon Road, an important cultural and subsistence resource area. The two hour long journey has nice changes in elevation, and travels from the subarctic landscape around Nome into the arctic tundra gradually during the trip. Some stretches of the road are subject to very strong winter winds off the sea.

The Teller Highway serves five hundred people living within a ten mile stretch of the road's end in the communities of Teller, Port Clarence and Brevig Mission. Although all three roads provide recreational, subsistence, and mining access, only Teller serves a year-round population base.

Uses

The Teller Road serves a number of uses:

- Provides community access (when open) from Nome to Teller, Brevig Mission, and Port Clarence.
- Links up with Wooley Road and coastal resources for subsistence and native art.
- Serves a number of mining claims, including the active Rock Creek Mine.
- Attracts birders, adventure travelers, hunters and anglers, including area residents.

Tourism Strengths / Deficiencies

Teller Road's primary strengths include:

- **Port Clarence Harbor Access** - Links Nome with a natural harbor where cruise ships can lay over during bad weather.
- **Culture** - Provides direct access to the village of Teller, an authentic, subsistence Eskimo village with a population of 247 people, Native crafts, one small local store and gift shop, and indirect access to the villages of Brevig Mission and Port Clarence. The Wooley Lagoon area and native lands along the road have been discussed as potential cultural attractions for tourists, although this would require interpretation, guides, and some infrastructure development.
- **Wildlife Viewing / Birding** - A local herd of 25,000 reindeer roam the Seward Peninsula and are often visible from the road along with musk ox, and other wildlife. Marine mammals including walrus can be seen off Woolley Lagoon

image by Kenneth and Emily Hughes from: <http://www.grantleyharbor.com>



Even in stormy conditions, Port Clarence provides a safe haven for cruise ships

Road along with a number of water birds. The upland tundra has Pacific Golden-Plovers, Northern Wheatears and Red-throated pipits, and Teller has White Wagtails that are of note to birders.

- **Scenery** - The road has wonderful views to the Kigluaik Mountains, a 75 mile long and 25 mile wide east-to-west mountain range that lies 100 miles south of the arctic circle. It also has wide open tundra



The Teller Road is known to tourists for its open tundra and wildlife, including reindeer and muskox



The opening of the Teller road in the spring is important to birders, but also to the population of five hundred who after the winter are low on basic supplies like fuel.

views, and provides Bering Sea access off the Woolley Lagoon Road. Teller has a beautiful natural harbor with a long sand spit used for subsistence fishing.

- **Fishing** - The Teller road provides visitors with good coho and pink salmon, grayling and Dolly Varden fishing in the following locations Snake River (mile 7.9), Penny River (mile 13.2), Cripple River (mile 20.3), Sinuk River (mile 26.7), Feather River (mile 37.4), Tisuk River (mile 48), and the Bluestone River (mile 58.1).
- **Recreation** - Hiking, camping, berry picking, hunting and are possible although trespass and competition with subsistence users can be a concern.

Teller Road's tourism deficiencies include:

- **Birding season access is dependent on snow conditions** - All three roads share this concern, although the Teller Road is less of an attraction than the other two.
- **Dust and rough road conditions** - Although the Teller Highway is maintained and graded in the summer, rough spots and dust can pose safety concerns, especially when tourists are not familiar with the road.

- **Lack of services** - Although many tourists enjoy being out on the tundra, some basic services (restrooms) at a point or two along the road would be desirable.
- **Lack of interpretation** - The Teller Highway's natural and cultural attractions are known to some birders and independent tourists, but there are missed opportunities for getting tourists to spend more time and money along the way.

Courtesy Lois McIver



There is potential for cultural tourism attractions linked with native subsistence, ivory carving and wildlife along Teller Road

Northwest Area Transportation Plan

Nome-Kougarok Road

“a.k.a. Taylor Road”

Facility Characteristics

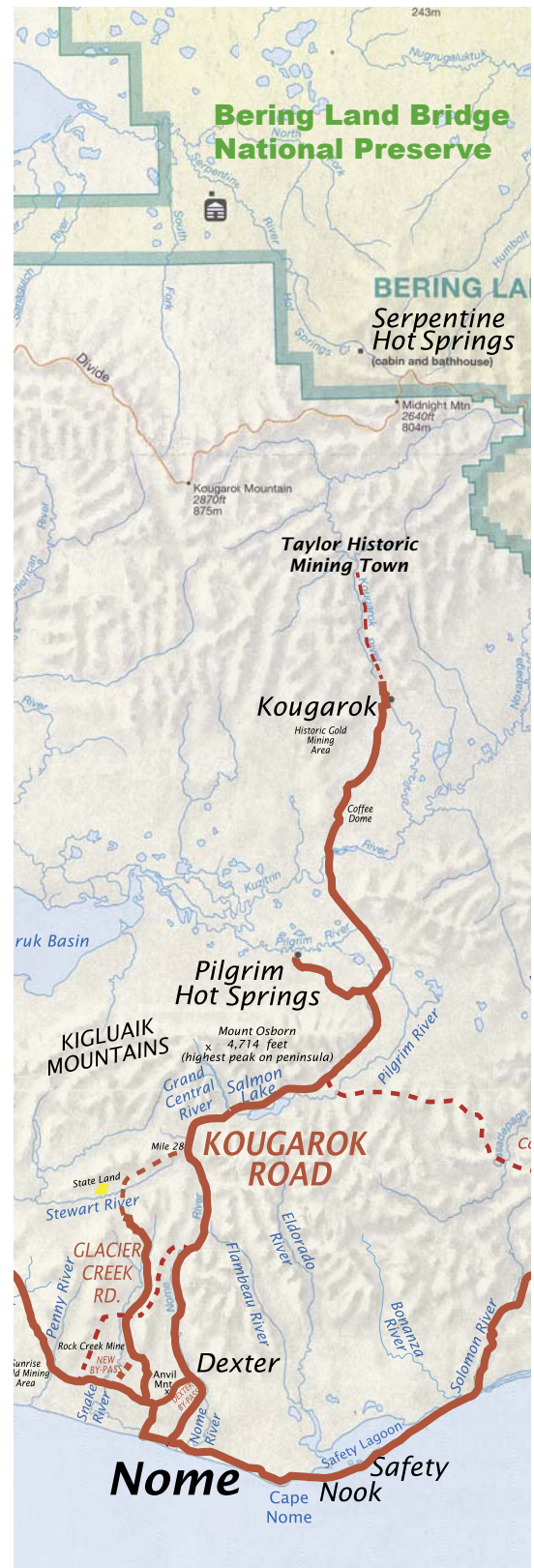
The Kougarok Road is 87 miles long and is “rough on tires and vehicles”. It is in the worst physical condition of the three highways. Portions of the road are wearing down through the gravel subbase. Spring thaws compound ongoing drainage problems and sometimes wash out sections of the road. It is not passable beyond the bridge at the Kougarok River and no longer provides access to Taylor. Two much needed improvement projects have been nominated in the STIP for miles 21-33, however these cost an \$13 million and are pending approval. A parking and interpretive signage project at mile 17 is nominated for 2005-2006 in the STIP.^{XX}

Physical and Community Context

The Kougarok Road heads north out of Nome, passing between Anvil Mountain on the west and low hills leading into Dexter on the east. Until around mile 28, the road is paralleled by the Nome River. It then curves out to follow the base of the Kigluaik Mountains and passes



Pilgrim Hot Springs has the potential to become a bigger attraction with better access, infrastructure and interpretation



Salmon Lake. The road then enters a low pass into the Pilgrim River drainage, crosses the Pilgrim and Kuzitrin Rivers, and ends at the Kougarok River bridge (although ATV's and rugged 4-wheel drive vehicles sometimes head further on the old "road" to Taylor which is little more than a rough trail).

The road stops approximately forty miles short of the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, and its main attraction, Serpentine Hot Springs. There are no plans to improve motorized access to the springs or into the preserve, either by an extension of the Kougarok Road or by improving the trail from Taylor (all terrain vehicles are for the most part prohibited within the preserve). The National Park's general management plan for the preserve seeks to limit ground access in order to preserve the natural, aesthetic and scenic values of the area. This limits the number of Nome residents and visitors who travel into the Preserve.^{xx}

Uses

The Kougarok Road leads past many old mining claims of the gold rush, and still provides access to a number of known mineral occurrences and active claims (mainly gold and titanium).^{xx} The road is primarily used for

image by Peter Bente



Bristle-Thighed Curlews are a key attraction on the Kougarok Road



The landscape along the Kougarok road features Kigluaik Mountain views, clear water streams and lakes, and tundra

seasonal access to mining, recreation, and cabin sites, and to subsistence resource areas. The only winter use of the road (besides snowmachining) is along the first fifteen or so miles, where the extension of utilities along the Nome River has led to some residential development.

Birders and residents are highly interested in traveling this route for recreation, scenery, wildlife viewing, Salmon Lake, and other attractions, but the road conditions make travel slow and difficult.

Tourism Strengths / Deficiencies

Kougarok Road's primary strengths include:

- **Wildlife Viewing / Birding** - In addition to an abundance of wildlife, the Kougarok provides access to the most sought-after species that birders come to the area to see: Bristle-Thighed Curlews. This is the only road accessible place in North America where this bird can be seen, at around 70 miles out on the Kougarok Road in the "Coffee Dome" area. Along the way, rocky crags provide nesting spots for gyrfalcons, golden eagles, and peregrine falcons. Salmon Lake is good for Loons, and the Pilgrim Hot Springs turn-off area has Northern Wheatears. The Kougarok River drainage is an attraction for

the Bristle-thighed Curlew, Blue Throat, and White Wagtail.

- **Mining History** - Along the Kougarok, evidence of the gold rush is visible. At miles 17-18 the Miocene, Seward and Pioneer mining ditches are visible. These were dug by hand along the ridges to transport water to the claims years ago. About ten miles out of Nome is the Dexter Roadhouse, rumored to have once been owned by Wyatt Earp.
- **Pilgrim Hot Springs** - This spring is beautifully situated with views to the Kigluik Mountains, but is a largely undeveloped tourism attraction. The spring naturally produces 175°F degree water through the permafrost at a rate of 60 gallons per minute, and is enjoyed by Nome residents and some tourists. During the gold rush the site had a saloon and roadhouse with a resort spa, but this burned down in 1908. Later, a severe influenza epidemic in the years 1916-1918 killed twelve hundred people living between St. Michael and Cape Prince of Wales leaving many children homeless. The Catholic Church built a home for them at what is now called Pilgrim Springs. The mission survived until 1942, by which time the children had grown up. A church and a few other old buildings mark the site. The springs are still owned by the Catholic Church and administered by the Diocese of Fairbanks. There are no immediate plans to develop a tourism attraction on the site, and in fact there is a lease until 2068 to develop geothermal power, although test wells have not identified the “mother lode”. If this happens, there is some interest in rebuilding Mary’s Igloo on tribal lands adjacent to the springs, with Pilgrim Springs Ltd. supplying the electricity for the new village (and potentially to Nome, villages and mining ventures throughout the Seward Peninsula).



Salmon Lake has a campground and is used for fishing and summer recreation

- **Fishing** - The road provides visitors with good coho and pink salmon, grayling and Dolly Varden fishing in the following locations: Nome River bridge crossing (mile 13), Pilgrim River (mile 19 to 65), Grand Central River (mile 35) that flows into Salmon Lake (mile 35 to 39), Kuzitrin River crossing (mile 68), Kougarok River (mile 68 to 86).
- **Other recreation** - Salmon Lake is a much-enjoyed camping and fishing spot. Hiking, camping, berry picking, hunting and are also possible along the Kougarok, although trespass and competition with subsistence users could be a concern.
- **Minimal services** - The Kougarok has some basic visitor services, including the Dexter Road House, the Salmon Lake Campgrounds, and the minimal infrastructure at Pilgrim Hot Springs.

Kougarok Road’s primary visitor deficiencies include:

- **Very rough road conditions** - The Kougarok is very “rough on tires and vehicles”, posing problems for visitors and residents, and raising costs and concerns for rental car companies. It is in the worst physical condition of the three highways. Portions of the road are wearing down through the gravel subbase. Spring thaws compound ongoing drainage problems and

sometimes wash out sections of the road. It is not passable beyond the bridge at the Kougarok River and no longer provides access to Taylor.

- **Birding season access is dependent on snow conditions** - All three roads share this concern, but mile 70 on the Kougarok is the Nome area's biggest birding attraction. If the Coffee Dome area is not accessible by car during the height of the visitor season, some birders will choose to not to travel to Nome.
- **Lack of interpretation** - Many visitors on the Kougarok know what they are looking for: Bristle-Thighed Curlew. Roadside signs about birds, especially near breeding grounds could cause problems, and would not help the visitors better enjoy their trip. However, cultural and historical interpretive materials, and bird and wildlife information that could be taken in the car would help birders to better appreciate the drive out to their "lifetime" bird, and could also give them tips on etiquette (e.g., when you stop, consider other drivers on the road and do not leave all the car doors open!). Interpretive materials, signage, and access areas are an important opportunity
- **Undeveloped potential attractions** - The Kougarok Road appeals to birders and residents primarily. The natural, historical and cultural resources along the road would require improvements and interpretation to broaden their appeal. A trail system along the ditchlines, or an "Audobon trail" could be developed with GPS information and maps to encourage more independent visitors to explore these resources. Some residents voiced an interest in linking the Kougarok road to the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve as a visitor attraction through a road extension out to Serpentine Hot Springs. By doing this, Nome could

photo courtesy Dennis Weidler <http://www.kicy.org/kicyretr.htm>



Serpentine Hot Springs

enhance its role as the gateway community for the preserve, and residents would have better access to the federal preserve in their "backyard". Currently, extensions of the road are not justifiable in terms of tourism or the preserve's access policy, and visitors can fly in, or drive and hike. However, in the long term, if mining resources along the road are developed, or geothermal energy is tapped at Pilgrim Hot Springs, there may be a number of synergies and this option could be raised for discussion with the preserve. Residents also mentioned enhancing tourism by developing new roads from Pilgrim Hot Springs to Teller behind the Kigluaik Mountains, and to Council on the old "Courderoy Road". This road loop could link attractions, and would be enjoyable to tourists.

photo courtesy Dennis Weidler <http://www.kicy.org/kicyretr.htm>



Lava cone near Serpentine Hot Springs . The area is surrounded by giant 60 foot tors, or granite columns

Northwest Area Transportation Plan

Nome-Council Road

photo courtesy John Doyle



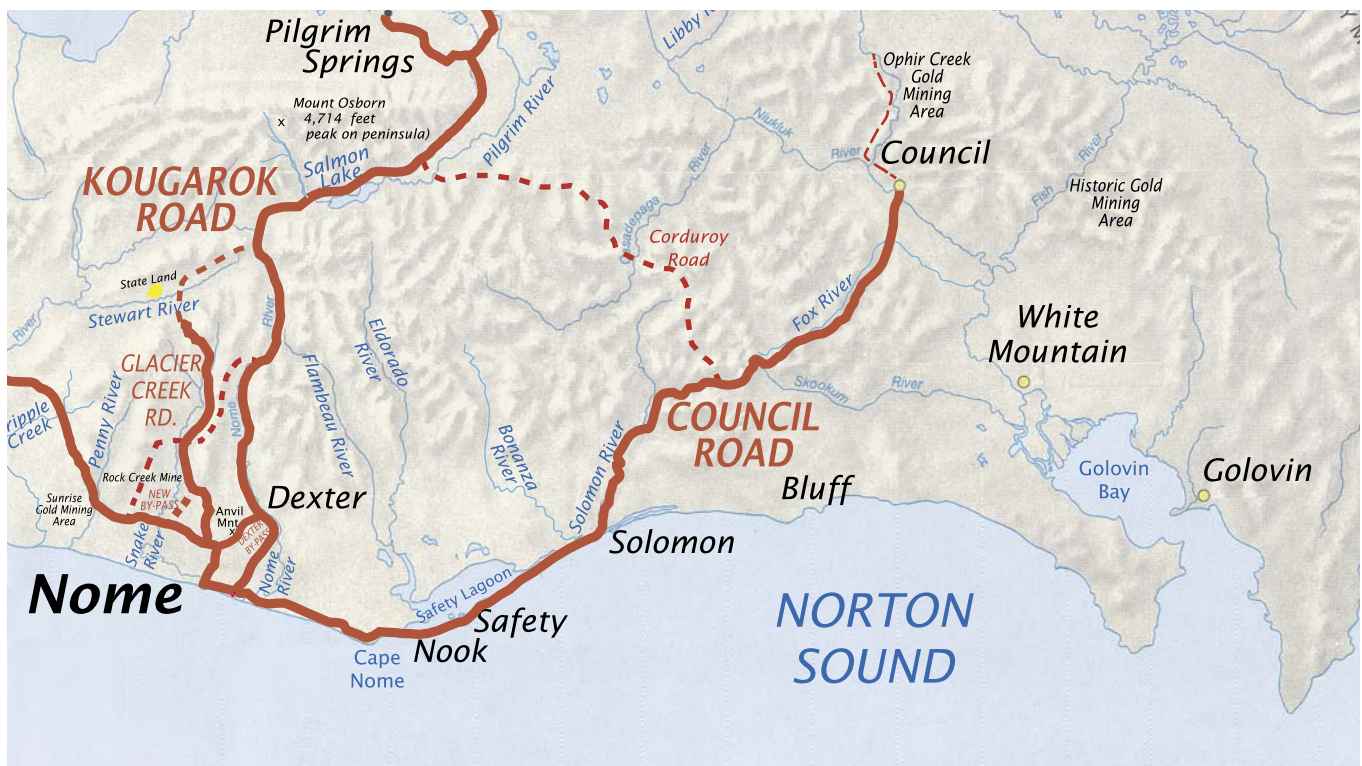
Coastal views and interior tundra-taiga are the scenic landscapes of the Council Road

Facility characteristics

This road, 72 miles long one-way, has been recently rebuilt and generally is in very good condition. The road ends at the Niukluk River, across the water from Council. A small road/trail across the river (no bridge) heads through the hills to the Ophir Creek mining area.

While bringing significant improvements, reconstruction efforts have also brought new concerns. In the vicinity of Nook and Safety Sound people have expressed concerns about the high speed of traffic with summer camps and children nearby. Reconstruction also created large cut sections along some stretches of road; these drift full of snow, delaying access in spring. (Old sections of road, which follow the contours of the land, tend to remain clear of snow.) Similarly, extensive

fills in some places have created high banks that increase the risk of serious accidents due to relatively minor complications such as flat tires, or mud or ice conditions. They also fill in with ice and snow during the no maintenance season, and become major obstacles to opening the road in the spring. Four improvement projects are nominated in the STIP (2004-2009) that would help



Northwest Area Transportation Plan

Nome Area Tourism Demand, Potential, and Infrastructure Study

address some of these issues by providing slope flattening, snow fencing, some correction of erosion problems, and some rehabilitation and realignment. In addition, wayside and related improvement projects are nominated in the STIP for 2005-2009.^{xx}

Physical and Community Context

From Nome this road leads due east for about 30 miles, as it parallels the beautiful sand beaches that made the Nome Gold Rush famous. After Cape Nome at 13 miles, the road stretches east for another 17 miles on the narrow beaches between Safety Lagoon and the Bering Sea. In this scenic area within 30 miles of Nome, observers have noted emperor geese and Stellar's eiders, and sea birds of great interest to birders.

At Bonanza, the road abruptly turns inland and north. Passing through the village of Solomon, for several miles it follows the Solomon River through the mining district with the same name. Here are numerous old gold dredges and other relics of a by-gone era, including railroad engines for a Solomon-Council line that was never completed.

On the far side of Skookum Pass the road enters a tundra-taiga transition zone, and along the Fox River motorists pass into North America's

photo courtesy John Doyle



Council Road provides important beach access

western-most continental forest. In places the spruce trees crowd the road, while in others large stretches of tundra afford sweeping views of the area's gentle topography, as well as caribou, moose and many birds. The end of the road at Council leads to the very edge of this transition zone, as the river drainages east and south are forested while those to the west and north are not.

Current uses, attractions and demand levels

Along the first thirty miles of the Council Road, subsistence and beach access are the road's primary functions. The small settlements of Nook, Safety, Solomon and Bluff are along this stretch of road. These settlements are largely Native corporation lands and allotments that are used for seal hunting, tomcodding, salmon fishing and drying, gathering and cultural activities. Sitnasauk Native Corporation has been working with ADOT&PF and the City of Nome for a number of years to improve public parking, beach access, cultural and historical interpretation opportunities, and amenities. Sitnasauk conveyed eight acres of land to the City of Nome at Fort Davis as a public resource for these purposes. Waysides are proposed at miles 4, 15, 17, 20 to meet these needs.

photo courtesy John Doyle



The Council Road parallels Nome's "golden beaches" for about 30 miles

Northwest Area Transportation Plan

Nome Area Tourism Demand, Potential, and Infrastructure Study

This stretch of road provides great beach access for summer activities including small-scale gold mining (a more lucrative form of recreation), camping, beach-combing, bonfires, picnics and swimming for cold-tolerant locals.

As the road turns inland, mining sites and fishing access, and views to the changing landscape and wildlife are the primary activities until the road reaches Council City, a historical gold rush town at the end of the road that for many years was virtually a ghost town. In recent years, Council has attracted Nome residents as a summer cabin spot, and although the census reported no one living in Council year-round, there are a number of newly constructed seasonal cabins, and even some cabins for rent. Interest in Council for fishing and summer camps is growing now that the road is improved.

Beyond Council, “Ophir Road” (more of a trail) travels out to the famous Ophir Creek mining district where there are still active claims and substantial mining resources.

courtesy Lois McIver



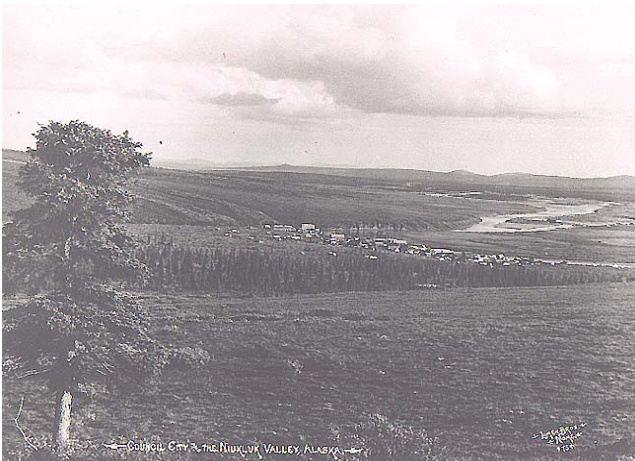
Coastal wildlife, like seals, can be seen on occasion at points off the road

Tourism Strengths / Deficiencies

The Council Road’s primary strengths include:

- **Wildlife Viewing / Birding** - Like the others, the road to Council provides access to a mix of animals and birds that interest visitors. The Nome River Mouth attracts gulls and shorebirds while Cape Nome has pelagic birds, eiders, loons, sea ducks. Safety Lagoon is a birding hot spot (second only to the Coffee Dome area) with loons, sea ducks, gulls and terns, tufted and horned puffins, crested auklets, common murres and pelagic cormorants. Occasionally in this area ringed seals have been seen basking on ice ledges. In Council’s forests spruce Grouse and Pine Grosbeaks can be found.
- **Gold Rush History** - Along the road, old dredges and mine sites are visible, along with the “train to nowhere”. In Council City, most of the historic buildings are gone, or at the point of caving in after decades of disrepair. Any buildings that could be restored and open for visitors would enhance the community as an attraction for visitors. Trails along the old mining ditch lines and rail tracks could provide an interesting attraction if developed.
- **Iditarod Trail** - Beyond the Iditarod season, the “trail” and checkpoints have some enduring interest. At mile 20 on Council Road the Safety Checkpoint is proposed as a wayside and interpretive site, and the

Lomen Brothers photo, courtesy John Doyle



Council City, was once a thriving gold rush town, and is in the western-most continental forest in North America

Northwest Area Transportation Plan

Nome Area Tourism Demand, Potential, and Infrastructure Study

federal BLM may be participating in this interpretive effort. Along the Iditarod trail, potential summer “family oriented” tourism opportunities could build on the strong youth interest in this event.

- **Transitional Zone Vegetation and Wildflowers** - Council Road provides a good opportunity to see how arctic and sub-arctic landscapes support different vegetation.
- **Fishing** - The road provides fishing opportunities for coho and pink salmon, grayling and Dolly Varden. Locations include the Nome River mouth (mile 3), Safety Sound and Bonanza Channel (miles 22-33), Solomon River (miles 40-50), Fox River (parallels road miles 50-65), Bear River (a few miles from Council), Niukluk River (end of road, mile 72).

The Nome-Council Road’s primary visitor deficiencies include:

- **Birding season access is dependent on snow conditions** - Birders are often disappointed when they cannot get out to Coffee Dome, but report that birds at Safety Lagoon made the trip worthwhile. If Safety Lagoon is not accessible (and neither is the Kougarok site), this could be a “birding” disaster that could discourage this market sector.
- **Dust** - Dust on the road poses a visibility problem for visitors, especially near the Safety Lagoon area on the Council Road. Dust is also a nuisance to settlements, and especially fish camps where salmon is drying, makes it hard to see and enjoy the scenery, and in excessive amounts can also hurt vegetation and wildlife.
- **Lack of services and amenities** - Beyond the Safety Roadhouse and a new B&B being developed in Solomon, there are

photo courtesy John Doyle



Recent access and interpretive improvements have been made at Council Road’s “train to nowhere”

limited opportunities for visitors to spend money, and utilize basic services along the Council Road. The proposed waysides can go a long way toward addressing these needs.

- **Need for interpretation and enhanced attractions.** Recent interpretive improvements at Ft. Davis and the “train to nowhere” provide a good start toward developing more opportunities for visitors. With the golden beaches, Iditarod Trail, and fish camps along this road there are many possibilities for providing interpretation and trying to better capitalize on the route’s historical and natural assets.
- **End of the road services.** Most tourists who are traveling to stay in Council have a contact person or guide to help drive or ferry them across the river when it is high. To orient sight seers and tourists who are unprepared when they arrive at the end of the road, a simple interpretive sign, tourism business listing and potentially a phone and restroom could help increase tourism in Council, and downstream in Golovin and White Mountain. These amenities could be co-located with a small unstaffed museum at the end of the road (like in McCarthy, Alaska) with odds and ends from the gold rush as an attraction.