

A Brief Chronology of Early Exploration - Kuskokwim/Yukon Rivers, 1790-1867

(Compiled by Raymond Collins)

- 1790 Alexsey Ivanov, leader of traders of Lebedev-Lastochin Co., explored northward from the shores of Shelikhov Lake (Lake Iliamna) for 3 months from Christmas to Easter. He crossed two large streams, Tutna and Balsanda (?) - he apparently went up the Nushagak, crossed over to the Holitna and descended to the Kuskokwim (Tutna). Then he went downriver as far as Ukhagmak (Uhagmyut) from which he could portage to the Yukon (Balsanda). The origin of the name Balsanda is not clear.
- 1818 Peter Korsakovskiy was sent by Baranov to establish a post on the Nushagak. He traveled from Cook Inlet to Iliamna Lake, and the along the shore of Bristol Bay. He explored the coast as far as the Kuskokwim River which he ascended. With him were Fedor Kolmakov, creole Klimovskiy and 20 local people. On this trip he stayed in the house of Yeremy Radionov who was already carrying on trade with the Kuskokwim people. Fort Alexander was built on the Nushagak and Fedor Kolmakov was appointed the commander.
- 1829 Pilot I. F. Vasilev ascended the Nushagak, exploring and mapping, but did not cross to the Yukon.
- 1830 Vasilev again left Alexander Redoubt with Fedor Kolmakov and Semen Lukin (who has been the interpreter at the Fort since 1819). They were reluctantly accompanied by 11 Kuskokwim people (either Georgetown Ingalik or Eskimos). They ascended the Nushagak and descended the Holitna.
- 1832 Kolmakov established a post at the mouth of the Holitna, left Lukin in charge, and explored the Kuskokwim for 150 km. (93 miles) upstream.

- 1833 Kolmakov and Lukin returned and set up a new post at the mouth of the Kwik River.
Tebenov established a post at St. Michael's on Norton Sound at the direction of Baron Wrangell.
- 1834 Susitna River explored by Malakov.
In January Andrey Glazunov traveled overland from Fort St. Michael by way of the Anvik River in an attempt to reach Cook Inlet. He reached the Yukon and from there he portaged to the Kuskokwim where he met Lukin who attempted to discourage him from traveling at that time of year (Feb.). Glazunov went on ascending the Kuskokwim and the Stony until they found the travel conditions insurmountable and they had to turn back and retrace their steps to St. Michael's. (VanStone, 1978, p. 3)
- 1836 Glazunov founded the post at Ikogmiut (Russian Mission). During this time Lukin continued his exploration up the Kuskokwim from his post on the Lower Kuskokwim. The Eskimos attacked St. Michael's but were driven off.
- 1838 Malakov left St. Michael's in February and was the first Russian to cross the Unalakleet portage. (Earlier Glazuov had been directed by the Eskimos to use the longer Anvik River portage as they did not want the shorter route known.) He ascended the Yukon to Nulato and then in March went on up to the mouth of the Koyukuk. After breakup he descended the Yukon to Fort St. Michael and thus was the first to sail from Nulato to the sea. (Loyens, 1970, p. 18)
- 1839 Peter Kolmakov, son of Fedor Kolmakov, (Fort Alexander factor) ascended the Kuskokwim, and the Takotna and portaged over to the Tlegon (Upper Innoko) River in the fall. He descended the Innoko until the approximate vicinity of Dementi where he learned that Ikogmiut had been attacked and destroyed that spring by Eskimos. This may have been due to the small pox which struck the area in 1838-39

which was blamed on the Russians. Kolmaov therefore had to turn back and retrace his route to the Kuskokwim.
(VanStone, 1978, p. 4)

- 1840 Malakov repeated his earlier journey and established a post at Nulato.
The Unalakleet post was founded.
- 1841 The Kuskokwim post was moved for the 3rd and last time, diagonally across the river from its 1833 location, and renamed Kolmakov Redoubt in honor of Fedor Kolmakov who died in 1840.
Nulato post was rebuilt by Derabin who remained in command. (Oswalt, 1963, p. 13; Dall, 1870, p. 341)
- 1842-44 Zagoskin was sent to explore the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. The Russian American Company was concerned that Alaskan furs were being traded by the interior Indians to the coastal Eskimos who then traded with the Chukchis. Thus the company was being bypassed and losing needed revenues on both trade goods and furs. Zagoskin was to determine the trade routes in the interior and how this flow of furs might be stopped and redirected to the company. Zagoskin traveled up the Yukon above the mouth of the Nowitna, up the Koyukuk and part way through the Kateel River portage, through the Yukon/Kuskokwim as far as the mouth of the Takotna. He also traveled up the Innoko River to the next settlement above Holikachuk, possibly the current site of Dementi. His journal contains extensive ethnographic material. (Zagoskin, 1967)
- 1844 Gregoriev renewed the attempt to explore the Copper River. Kashevarof continued his exploration of the Bering seacoast (Dall, 1870, p. 341)
- 1845 Etolin, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian American Co., issued strict orders on treatment of natives by employees. No servant of the Company was allowed to strike a native except in defense of his life. (Dall, 1870, p. 341)

- 1847 McMurray descended the Porcupine River and built Fort Yukon near its mouth. The British government sent three expeditions to search for Sir John Franklin who had not been heard from since July 25, 1845 while on a search for the Northwest Passage.
- 1848 The American ship Superior under Captain Roys was the first whaler to visit the Bering Strait and soon filled his ship. Word of his success spread and he was followed by 154 American whalers. (Dall, 1870, p. 345)
- 1850 Barnard accompanied Derabin from St. Michael to Nulato. He was seeking information on the lost Franklin Expedition. (Dall, 1879, p. 345)
- 1851 Barnard and Derabin were massacred at Nulato in February along with a number of Indian residents by the Koyukuk River Indians.
Fort Selkirk, established by Robert Campbell on the Upper Yukon, was attacked by Tlingit Indians from the coast and destroyed. The inmates were not harmed however. Both of these attacks were related to trade in that these interior posts interrupted traditional native trade monopolies and were resented. Barnard may also have insulted the Koyukon Indians by his insensitive summoning of native leaders for information on Franklin. (Dall, 1870, p. 50; Wickersham 1938, p.5-6)
- 1859 A new fort was built at Nulato on the old site. (Dall, 1870, p. 349)
- 1860 Robert Kennicott passed the winter at Fort Yukon (Dall, 1870)
- 1864 The Western Union Telegraph expedition was organized to build a line from San Francisco to the Bering Strait which would be crossed by a cable and then connect with the

Russian government telegraph at the mouth of the Amoor River. (Dall, 1870)

- 1865 The telegraph work commenced under various officers. Robert Kennicott was appointed Chief of the Scientific Corps. Frederick Whymper was the expedition artist. This whole project was brought about by the failures to lay a trans-atlantic cable.
- 1866 Robert Kennicott died at Nulato. Ivan Simonsen Lukeen carried out Kennicott's plans and explored the Yukon from Nulato to Fort Yukon. William H. Dall was sent to Nulato to replace Kennicott. (Dall, 1870)
- 1867 Western Union Telegraph Co. abandoned its project after having spent \$3,000,00 when they found that a successful trans-Atlantic cable had been laid.