

Petersville Road

Soon after Henry Bahrenburg blazed the Cache Creek Wagon Road, the Alaska Road Commission (ARC), a long-vanished government agency, developed this trail into a dirt wagon road. With the growth of Petersville, a community along the road's path, the formal name of Petersville Road was adopted. While very few historic sites and structures remain today, this road was truly the lifeline for the area west of the Susitna River. If it wasn't for the construction of this road, the community of Trapper Creek would not exist as it is today as it was the catalysis for settlement in the area. ARC workers were essentially the first people to settle the area. Few historic buildings that once served the ARC crew and other weary travelers remain along the Petersville Road.



The ARC team used various types of tools and equipment to upgrade the trail and keep it passable for the wagons and early motorized vehicles accessing the mines. Picks, shovels and hand-saws were common tools of the day. Horses and wagons (and eventually motorized trucks and trailers) were used to haul materials and manpower to the various ARC cabins and shelters along the route. This 1929 Model AA dump truck was used by the ARC team to haul gravel along the Petersville Road. Long-time Trapper Creek resident, Bob Watkins, obtained the truck from Trapper Creek pioneer settler, Shorty Bradley, in the 1960's and has donated it to the Trapper Creek Museum where it resides today.

Parks Highway

The community grew again in 1968 with the construction of the Parks Highway. The highway "cemented" Trapper Creek's existence in a way and its intersection with the Petersville Road is the "heart" of Trapper Creek today.

For more information on Trapper Creek, www.trappercreek.org provides a wealth of information on local businesses, accommodations, events, historical information and more.

The State of Alaska's Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development's website also provides information on the community and area as a whole, www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF_COMDB.htm

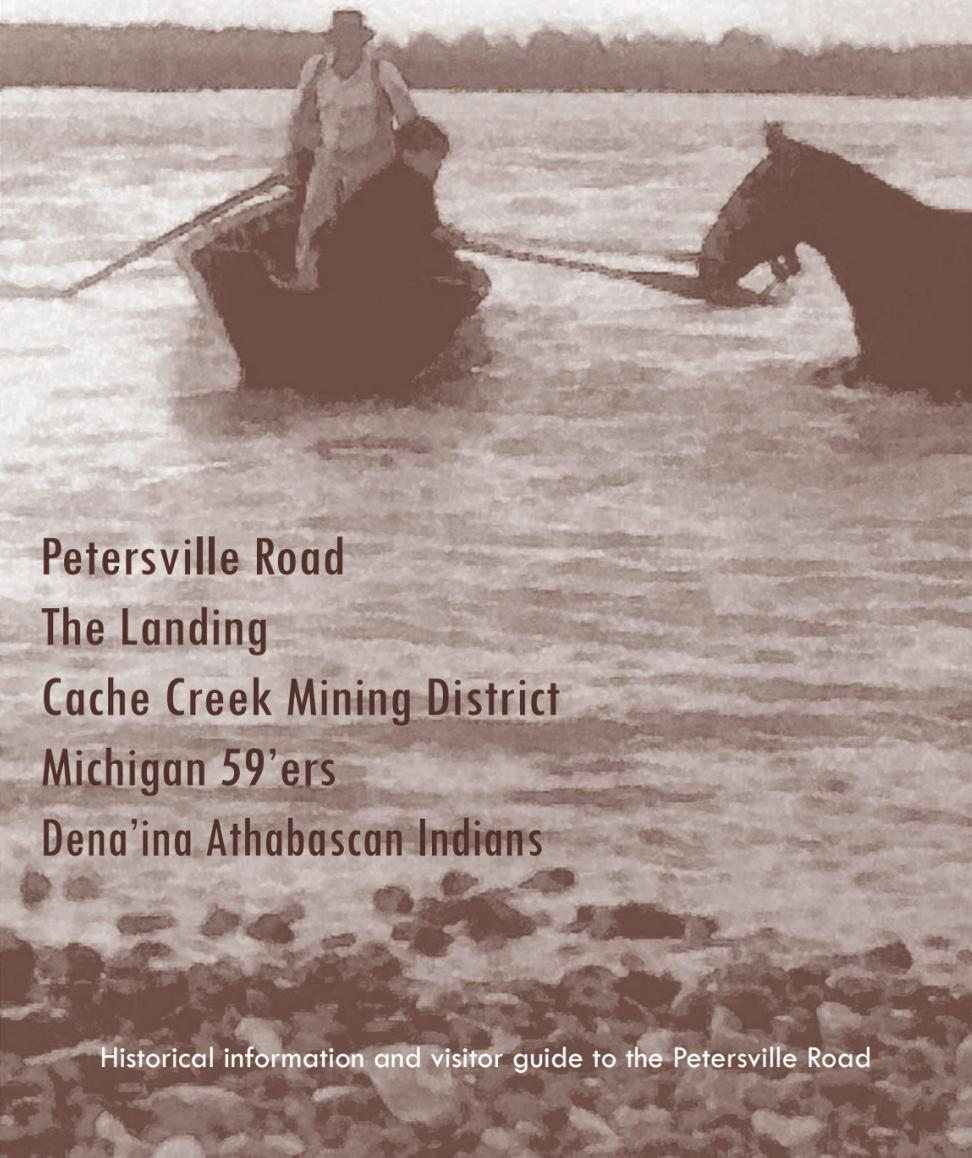
For more information on the Matanuska-Susitna Borough as a whole, visit www.matsugov.us

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All historic photos came from the Trapper Creek Museum/Ken Marsh.
Present day photos were taken by Agnew::Beck Consulting staff.

Trapper Creek

a diverse community rich with history



Petersville Road

The Landing

Cache Creek Mining District

Michigan 59'ers

Dena'ina Athabascan Indians

Historical information and visitor guide to the Petersville Road

Trapper Creek is a small community with a diverse, rich past

Dena'ina Athabascan Indians

Two-thousand years ago, the Dena'ina Athabascan Indians settled Southcentral Alaska. They used the Susitna Valley rivers to travel the area and established villages and trading camps up and down this valley. Places like the land at the mouth of Kroto Creek and the area near the mouth of the Talkeetna River (site of present day Talkeetna) were among the most important of these sites.

Prior to 1917, only the Dena'ina native people settled in what is now known as Trapper Creek. Although no evidence shows any long-term settlements in the area, the native people were certainly familiar with the lay of the land and knew where to find the abundant fish and game for subsistence living. As time passed, the Dena'ina clustered around the white-man settlements and their customs became tainted by their new dependence on the white traders. The Dena'ina gradually drifted away from their traditional Susitna Valley haunts with the discovery of gold in places Cache Creek and the construction of the Alaska Railroad. Although their traditional camps in the forest and along the rivers are all but abandoned, the influence of the Dena'ina is everywhere – many of the area's lakes, creeks, mountains and hills are derived from the Dena'ina language.



Mining

Trapper Creek exists because it geographically sits between the historic Cache Creek mining district and the community of Talkeetna. In the early 1900's, miners would find their way to Cache Creek by taking boats from the old Susitna Station up the Susitna River, Chulitna and Tokositna Rivers, then overland through bogs and brush and other laborious territory. As more miners arrived, a wagon trail was constructed by the Cache Creek Mining District from McDougall, a small community and supply point along Yentan River. While serving a great need for the miners, it too was a difficult route and certainly not the most direct. In 1917, Henry Bahrenburg a miner from Cache Creek, blazed a trail from the mine to Talkeetna, where an Alaska Railroad connection was recently established. Known in the beginning as the Cache Creek Wagon Road, this route was the fastest and easiest way to reach the mining regions in the areas around Peters and Cache Creek.



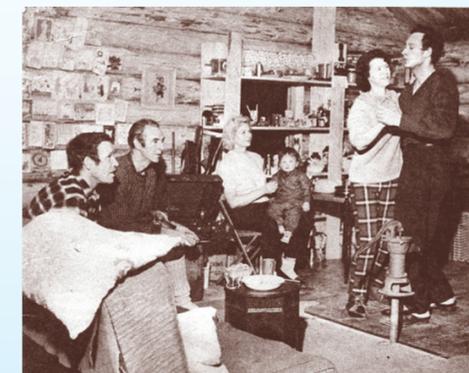
1) An old log building (probably used as a barn) that once stood at the Landing, now belongs to a long-time local resident.
2) An Alaska Road Commission warehouse that once stood at the Landing (1932).

Landing

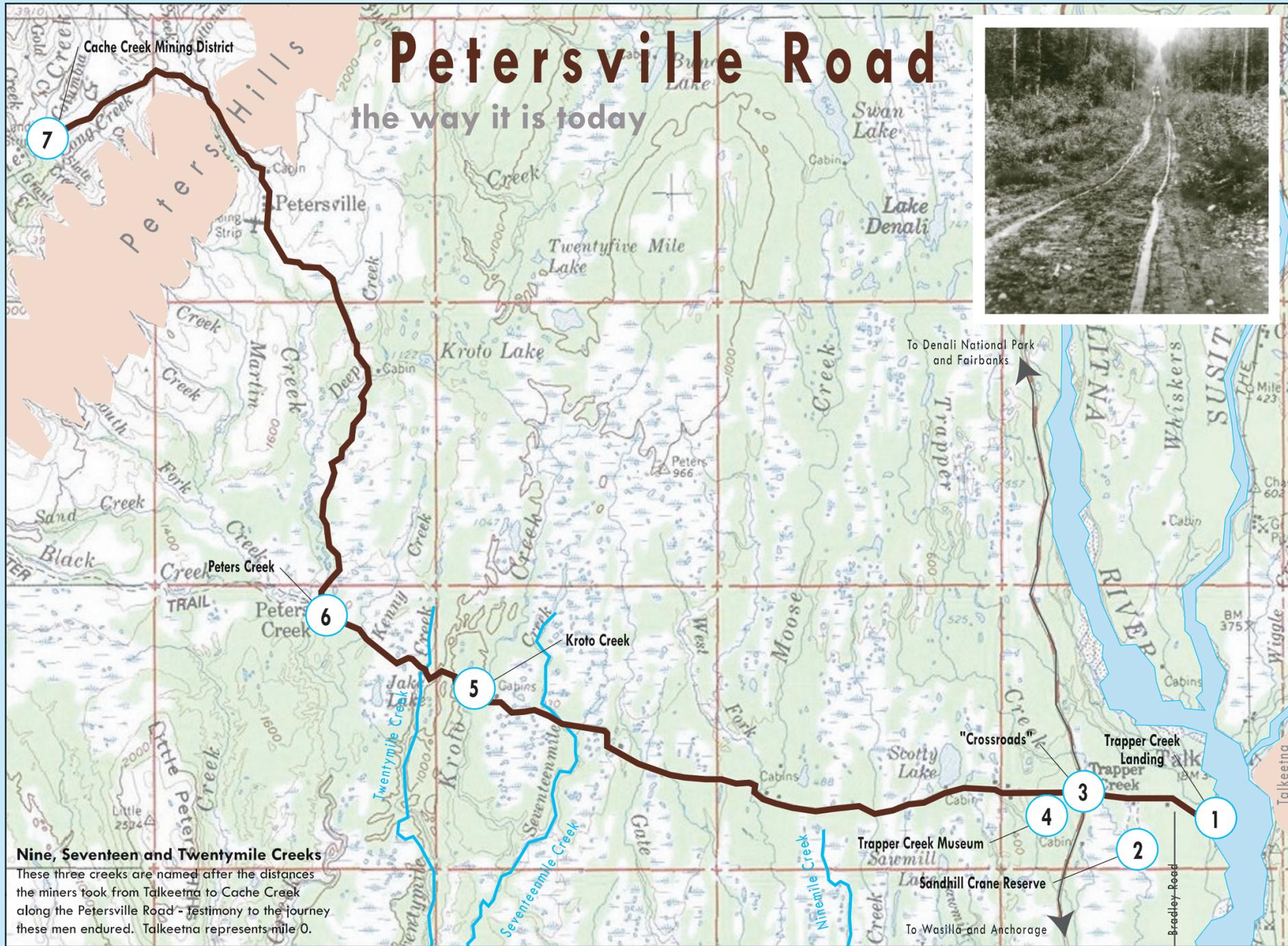
The Trapper Creek Landing was established because it was a re-supply and maintenance point for travelers crossing the Susitna River and a construction camp for the ARC team. In addition to being ARC's headquarters, the Landing was depended upon by miners, trappers and homesteaders alike. The Landing was essentially the "gateway" to what is now known as Trapper Creek and more distant areas, such as Peters Creek, Cache Creek and the Yentna gold fields. To get to the Landing from Talkeetna in the summer, travelers crossed the river either by long flat boats or flew by plane. In the winter, the frozen river was crossed by snowshoe, dog, horse or early tractor pulled by sleds over the ice.

59'ers

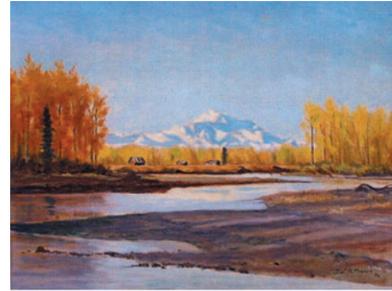
It wasn't until 1959 that Trapper Creek really began to grow. A group of later day pioneers known as the Michigan 59'ers caravanned to Alaska together in search of the "New Michigan." Their goal was to create cooperative communities where everyone would help clear land and build shared structures. Many of the 59'ers homesteaded in the Susitna River Valley. Those who found their way to Trapper Creek settled primarily along the Petersville Road and Trapper Creek. The photo to the right shows some local 59'ers celebrating in the old Donaldson homestead cabin - now home to the Trapper Creek Museum.



the way it was



Talkeetna & Crossing the Susitna River
While just across the Susitna River from the Trapper Creek Landing, getting to Talkeetna involves a 35 mile trip by vehicle or in the winter when the river is frozen, a snowmachine or dog sled ride. Prior to the construction of the arks Highway, boats (in addition to planes, snowshoes and sleds) like these were used to transport miners, goods and farm animals from Talkeetna, where the train was, to the Landing.



1 Trapper Creek Landing
The Landing is where the Petersville Road begins on the west side of the Susitna River. Today, the Landing is used primarily as an informal boat launch and take-out area for both motor and raft boats. (The feasibility of an improved boat launch is currently in the planning and permit phase.) Visit the Landing for a picnic, boat in a branch of the Susitna River or stroll along one of the historic trails. The painting below is of the Landing, with Mt. McKinley in the background, from the Talkeetna side of the river. Artist, Curt W. Wagner Jr. lived in Trapper Creek in the 1950's but currently resides in Talkeetna.



2 Sandhill Crane Reserve
Just south of Saunders Road (which is off of Bradley near the east end of the East Petersville Road) is a Sandhill Crane Reserve. While May is the best month to see these birds, the cranes can be seen during the months of x and x. They flock to this area because

3 The Crossroads
When the Parks Highway was completed in 1968, the intersection between it and the Petersville Road slowly became the "town center" of Trapper Creek. Today, services such as gas, food, restaurants, lodging and gifts can be found at the crossroads. Several public facilities such as the post office, library, EMS building, community center, transfer site, elementary school and playground are also in vicinity.

Place Names Every local area has thousands of place names. Where these names originated from differs from region to region. Often they came from events, important happenings in the area, geographic features and land marks. Other times they have been handed down to us by the native people who first wandered the lands. The Upper Susitna Valley is no exception to these naming methods. Each place names can give us a glimmer of insight into our background or history - specifically the Dena'ina people, who lived here for hundreds of years before the first white man ever arrived. The foremost contributor to recording place names was Shem Pete. Shem Pete, born around 1896 on an island near Susitna Station, covered thousands of miles by foot and by boat, learning the traditional names for more than 600 places in the Upper Cook Inlet area. Below is just a few of the thousands of Upper Susitna Valley place names.

- Trapper Creek - a local term used for the creek in this community for many years by the first settlers. According to community pioneer Bob Watkins, the first homesteader, Shorty Bradley, and others pushed for the community to adopt this as its official name.
- Susitna River - "Sand or Sandy River," from the Dena'ina name, Suyitna. The spelling of this river changed many times and the present spelling evolved due to euphemistic reasons.
- Cache Creek - according to Shem Pete, his former brother-in-law, Susitna Pete, found gold in this creek while getting a drink of water and went on to build a cache here. Thus the creek became Cache Creek.
- Rabidoux (Rabideux?) Creek - named after the Rabidoux brothers, Noah and Oliver who trapped and lived on its banks as early as 1910.
- Kroto Creek - got its name from the Indian village once located at the mouth of this creek. In the early days, sometimes it was spelled as Croto. The Dena'ina called it Clearwater Creek meaning "On the Shoal Creek."

4 Trapper Creek Museum
The Trapper Creek Museum displays a wealth of information on Alaska's earliest pioneers. Its artifacts, pictures and stories depict the rugged life of local gold miners, fur trappers, homesteaders and other adventurers. Housed in a log cabin built by the Donaldson family, members of the Michigan 59'ers, a group of latter-day pioneers, the museum is off the Petersville Road, just west of the "Crossroads." Curator, Kenneth L. Marsh, has lived in Trapper Creek since the early 80's and serves on the board of directors of the Trapper Creek and Talkeetna Historical societies.



5 Kroto Creek
At milepost 13.5 of the Petersville Road, just a few miles past the paved section of the road, is Kroto Creek. Just within the Trapper Creek Community Council, Kroto Creek is home to a few businesses and residences. A trailhead provides parking for anglers and boaters and others wanting to enjoy the creek

6 Peters Creek
Along with Moose Creek, Kroto Creek, Cache Creek and Spruce Creek, Peters Creek was a "camp" along the Petersville Road that served the Alaska Road Commission crew and other weary travelers. At mile 18.5, Peters Creek is home to the Forks Roadhouse, a structure built in 1935-36 (as seen on the right) for Talkeetna merchant, Belle McDonald and sporadically operated by Trapper Creek pioneer, Shorty Bradley, and his wife Florence. The roadhouse remains in operation and serves visitors to this day.



Petersville
The road was originally called the Cache Creek Wagon Road, but with the growth of Petersville, a community that formed as the Alaska Road Commission developed this trail into a dirt wagon road, the formal name of Petersville Road was adopted.

7 Cache Creek Mining District
The Cache Creek gold mine was in operation from the early 1900's to x. The different methods of extracting the gold ranged from ground sluicing, hydraulics (using large water canons called "Giants") and a 25-ton capacity dredge. While this mining area was remote and rugged in many ways, it certainly intrigued and allured many. In the 1920's, between 250 and 300 miners worked at the mine.