MINUTE of the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works on the subject of an Overland Coach Road through British Territory, between the Pacific Coast and Canada, comparing the merits of the various passes through the Rocky Mountains, and showing the extent of this road already built in British Columbia, and what remains to be done to complete it beyond the eastern boundary of the Colony to the head of steamboat navigation on the Saskatchewan.

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LITTLE has hitherto been done towards the construction of trails or roads across the Rocky Mountains north of the 49th Parallel.

The primitive paths through the various passes of this Mountain Range, originally tracked out by Indians and only kept open year by year by their travel along them, are still the sole means of communication between British Columbia and the North West Territory.

Some little work was indeed done, years ago, by the Hudson's Bay Company in opening trails through the Leather and Athabasca Passes, to facilitate the passage of their brigades, which at that time carried supplies from the depots east of the Rocky Mountains to Jasper's House, and thence westwards, by the Tete Jaune Cache, down the Fraser River to the various posts in the region of country now included in British Columbia; or southward, by the Athabasca Pass, to the Boat Encampment, and down the Columbia to the posts in Washington and Oregon. But soon after the Company established posts at Fort Vancouver and Victoria supplied by ships direct from England, communication by these passes was discontinued, and the trails through them lapsed into disuse, and were soon in no better condition than before they were improved by the Hudson Bay Company's employes. At present, except when travelled over by occasional parties of prospectors or scientific explorers, these, as well as all the other Rocky Mountain passes in British Territory, are made use of by Indians only.

Many of these passes are however, even in their primitive condition, so easy of passage that horses carry heavy loads over them with facility; and through the Vermillion Pass loaded carts have been driven on the natural roadway unimproved by labor.

But, although the work of building a road over the Rocky Mountains has yet to be commenced, much has already been effected by this Colony towards the consummation of the much desired line of road communication, through British Territory, between the Sea Coast of British Columbia and Canada. In fact more than one-half (in cost) of this work within the limits of the Colony is now complete.

The Cascade Range of Mountains, the great barrier between the Sea Coast of this Colony and its interior districts, which presented a far more difficult engineering obstacle to road-making, and one more expensive to overcome than the Rocky Mountains themselves, has been pierced by two lines of coach road, which, commencing at Yale and Douglas respectively, the limits of steam-boat navigation on the Lower Fraser River and its tributary Harrison Lake, unite at Clinton, 136 miles from Yale, on the high, rolling plateau in the interior of the Colony, from which junction point the road extends 242 miles further northwards to Cameron-town, in the heart of the Cariboo District, distant altogether 378 miles from Yale.

A branch road 23 miles long, has also been built from the main line, at a point on the Buonaparte River 110 miles from Yale, to Savona's at the lower (western) end of Kamloops Lake, from which place uninterrupted steam-boat navigation extends through Kamloops Lake, and up the South Thompson River to the upper (eastern) end of Great Shuswap Lake, a distance of 115 miles, and also up the North Branch of Thompson River, which joins the South Thompson at Fort Kamloops, to a distance of 85 miles from the latter post.

These roads, constructed at a total cost of $1,339,915 (about £275,000), of which amount the section from Yale to Savona's cost $830,000 (about £166,000), are of a character very superior to that of public roads in most young Countries.