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## CONTENTS

Road Transport in the Pioneer North.....	1
Skiing in Western Canada's Parks .....	3
College Post for Robertson .....	4
INCO Teaching Grants .....	4

July Strikes and Lockouts .....	4
Military Aid to Tanzania .....	4
Two New Centennial Stamps .....	5
Fewer Forest Fires.....	5
Top CS Post for Indian.....	5

## ROAD TRANSPORT IN THE PIONEER NORTH

*The problem of transportation in the Yukon and Northwest Territories was the subject of a paper presented recently, at the Canadian Transportation Research Forum, by Mr. E.R. Weick, Research Economist, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. The following is a partial text:*

The history of road transportation in the North is quite recent, and for a long time the Yukon and Northwest Territories depended almost completely on other modes, both for internal and external transport.

Water transport has been, and still is, very important. Stern-wheelers regularly plied the Yukon River between Whitehorse and Dawson City from the time of the Gold Rush until 1955, providing virtually the sole means of internal transport in the area. Water transport has also been important in linking the Yukon with the South since Gold Rush days. Coastal vessels connect southern ports such as Vancouver with the Alaskan port of Skagway, which is the coastal terminus of the British Yukon Railway, a division of the small but complex White Pass and Yukon system. In the N.W.T., speaking of the region as a whole, water transport by tug and barge on the Mackenzie River system and by ocean vessel operating along the coast and in the Arctic Islands is still the most important mode of internal and external freight transport. This is no longer so everywhere in the territory, however, as road transport, and, more recently, rail transport, are making their presence felt in particular areas.

### ROLE OF AIRCRAFT

Air transport has also been very important. Over the years, its function has changed remarkably. In the halcyon days of the bush-pilot, it was a dramatic

instrument for rolling back the frontiers. There are still bush-planes and bush-pilots in the North - and, indeed, they will play a necessary role for many years to come. However, something else has been developed - quite rapidly - which today is of far greater consequence. Regular scheduled passenger services are now available to most parts of the North with aircraft comparable in quality to those flown on many mainline services in the more populated parts of the continent. In a region as vast as the North, the aircraft is still indispensable for moving people and high value goods.

### FIRST TERRITORIAL ROADS

Roads linking the territories with the developed parts of Canada were built mainly during times which may soon, if they are not already, be regarded as "historic". Moreover, they were built for purposes which either no longer really apply or are very secondary to the main present-day usage of the roads. Thus the Alaska Highway was built during the Second World War as a military road.... As a military road - which it still officially was until April 1, 1964 - the Alaska Highway hardly counts any more. Since the end of the war, it has played a growing civil role in the north-northwest. While it must still have some military implications..., these have tended to fade very much into the background as other means of providing logistic support to Alaska have been devised.

The Mackenzie Highway, which connects the southern fringe of the Mackenzie District of the N.W.T. with the Edmonton and Peace River regions of Alberta, like the Alaskan Highway, had rather specialized and limited beginnings. It started as a