



THE ROAD-BED NEAR THE SUMMIT.

years in their journeys from the coast to the interior, were finally abandoned by the majority of the immigrants; White pass, with Skagway as the port of entry, became the favorite route. This was seen to be the logical path for the iron horse to make his entry into the Yukon valley, getting over the range at the lowest altitude. English and American capitalists soon had their engineers on the spot, and the work of building the White Pass and Yukon railway followed close upon the preliminary surveys.

The route starts from Skagway, traverses White pass, descends into the Yukon valley by way of the chain of lakes and ends at Fort Selkirk, on the Yukon, over three hundred miles from Skagway. The twenty miles between tide-water and the top of the pass presented a problem of great difficulty. In this there is a rise of two thousand eight hundred and fifty feet, nearly all of which must be overcome in one part. The distinguishing feature in accomplishing this is the employment of many sharp curves, built with great skill on shelves in the face of the rock. By this means a maximum grade of 3.9 per cent., or two hundred and six feet to the mile, has been obtained. Few railroads not depending on the cog can boast of such a steep gradient.

Begun in the spring of 1898, the work steadily advanced under a force of one thousand five hundred workmen, and in days twenty-two hours in length. On the 20th of last February the first train

arrived at the top of the pass, and the terminus at Fort Selkirk will probably be reached before the close of this year. The road is a single-track narrow-gauge, and its equipment is light, but its mission is a merciful one, and puts an end to the terrible discomfort and danger of the overland route to the new Eldorado. So far the cost has been excessive, something like sixty thousand dollars a mile, but the very difficult conditions met with in the beginning will disappear in the descent to Fort Selkirk, and the construction consequently will be much cheaper.

There have been many who have predicted an extension of our railway systems along the western shores of this continent to confront a similar extension of the Trans-Siberian on the opposite shores of Bering strait. All things considered, it is quite safe to say that through trains from San Francisco to St. Petersburg are not of the near future. The White Pass and Yukon is not to be thought of as the first link of a scheme at present impracticable. For some time to come it will be a modest affair, and would fail for lack of sustenance were it not for excessive passenger and freight rates. One may ride on its cars for twenty cents a mile, or ship freight at charges equivalent to one hundred dollars per ton between Chicago and New York. The development of the country through which the road will pass will soon reduce these high rates. At all events, they are so reasonable in comparison with those of the Indian packers, who have been asking from fifteen to forty cents per pound to get



MESSENGER ON THE TRAIL BEYOND THE SUMMIT, WITH NEWS OF THE ALIEN EXCLUSION ACT.

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