

1897, before the rush had begun, but a new competitor now appeared in the field that was for all time to settle the supremacy of Skagway. This new comer was an international railroad, whose survey ran twenty miles through American territory from tide water at Skagway to the summit of the pass and the international boundary, and thence three hundred and twenty-five miles to Fort Selkirk, on the Yukon River, below White Horse Rapids and other dangers and but one hundred and seventy-four miles above Dawson.

This railroad is now in operation to the summit of the White Pass and much of the grading is done for twenty miles more to Lake Bennett. If it should stop here the aerial tram could still prove a dangerous rival, because the capital charges are so much less, operating expenses less, and its capacity could be easily increased to one hundred tons a day. The difficulty has been, not in transporting but in handling the freight at the two termini, where accumulations almost inextricable confusion and long delays.

Freight rates from Dyea to Bennett by way of the tram are, in March, 1899, three cents and a half a pound, and the same by the railroad. From the summit the railroad company has opened one of the best snow roads in the world. It was made by sending team after team through the snow drifts, packing down the snow until the hard bed rose above the level of the snow field and was thus swept clear by the wind. It is staked with saplings on both sides and can be followed in the darkest night or severest storm. Log Cabin, the custom house and mounted police station, is twelve miles from the summit and boundary, and is also at the end of the White Pass series of lakes, Summit, Middle and Shallow. The former trail from Log Cabin to Bennett was difficult both winter and summer, as it passed over a high and rocky divide, winding steeply up and down along the slopes. The new railroad trail was opened by cutting down trees, grubbing out stumps, blasting away boulders, packing down snow drifts, and is a beautiful and model road.

Freight carried to the summit by the railroad is there transferred to double bob four-horse sleds with wide runners and each such sled can be loaded with half a ton. Three or four of the freighting firms have formed a through freight line in connection with the railroad and through bills of lading are issued. A big freighters' camp is established near Log Cabin half way between the summit and Bennett and each morning except Sunday (for the mounted police will not allow freighting on Sunday), teams start in both directions, thus giving the horses ten miles of load down grade, and ten miles empty.