

If ever there was a Canadian construction project in which the difficulties all argued against action, this was it. However, the RCAF was not to be daunted, and in this enterprise they found determined allies in government and industry.

Once we had decided to push ahead with it -- and this was less than three years ago -- dozens of sites had to be chosen along 2700 miles of little known and inadequately mapped territory. Aerial photography by the RCAF and large-scale maps by the Canadian Army made possible the preliminary selection of sites. Next, came the ground survey and siting parties to verify or improve on the locations, both from the construction and electronic points of view. Then came the designing of the buildings for the various types of stations and to meet the special conditions of the country.

The building of the Mid-Canada line is a notable construction story, but above all, it is the story of transportation. Each phase of the project has depended on getting the supplies, material and construction workers to the right place at the right time. If -- as well it may -- the building of the Mid-Canada line becomes one day a part of Canadian folklore, accounts of these journeys and hauls will, I am sure, be longest recalled and recounted to succeeding generations.

Many means of transportation have been used in the trek northward: ship, train, truck, and tractor train, airplane and helicopter. The eastern and central areas have been, by the nature of their terrain, most difficult to traverse.

At Moosonee, for example, there was, at one stage, a great marshalling of 9000 tons of freight that had to go forward this winter and spring by tractor train over the trackless wastes to a desolate site near Hudson Bay. Where no road existed, one was built -- surely one of the most extraordinary roads ever made - the Snow Trail, a wide, smooth highway of packed snow and ice, taking the tractor trains north for 500 miles along the western shores of James Bay and Hudson Bay.

To build this road a survey party first set out, followed by Indians on snowshoes, then by snowmobiles and, finally, by tractors and tractor trains.

The Snow Trail is melting now and may not be needed again, and the tractors are striving to reach their summer bases before they mire down in the muskeg. But for further advances into the north there is now a new transport technique -- thanks to the ingenuity of the Mid-Canada engineers.

Experimentation is the mark of this project. Studies are being made of a great balloon-tired vehicle, with wheels 8 to 12 feet in diameter, which might replace the much slower tractor train. To traverse the hitherto impassible muskeg, the "muskeg buggy" and other amphibious vehicles are now being tried out.