

Mount McKinley Three Weeks from New York

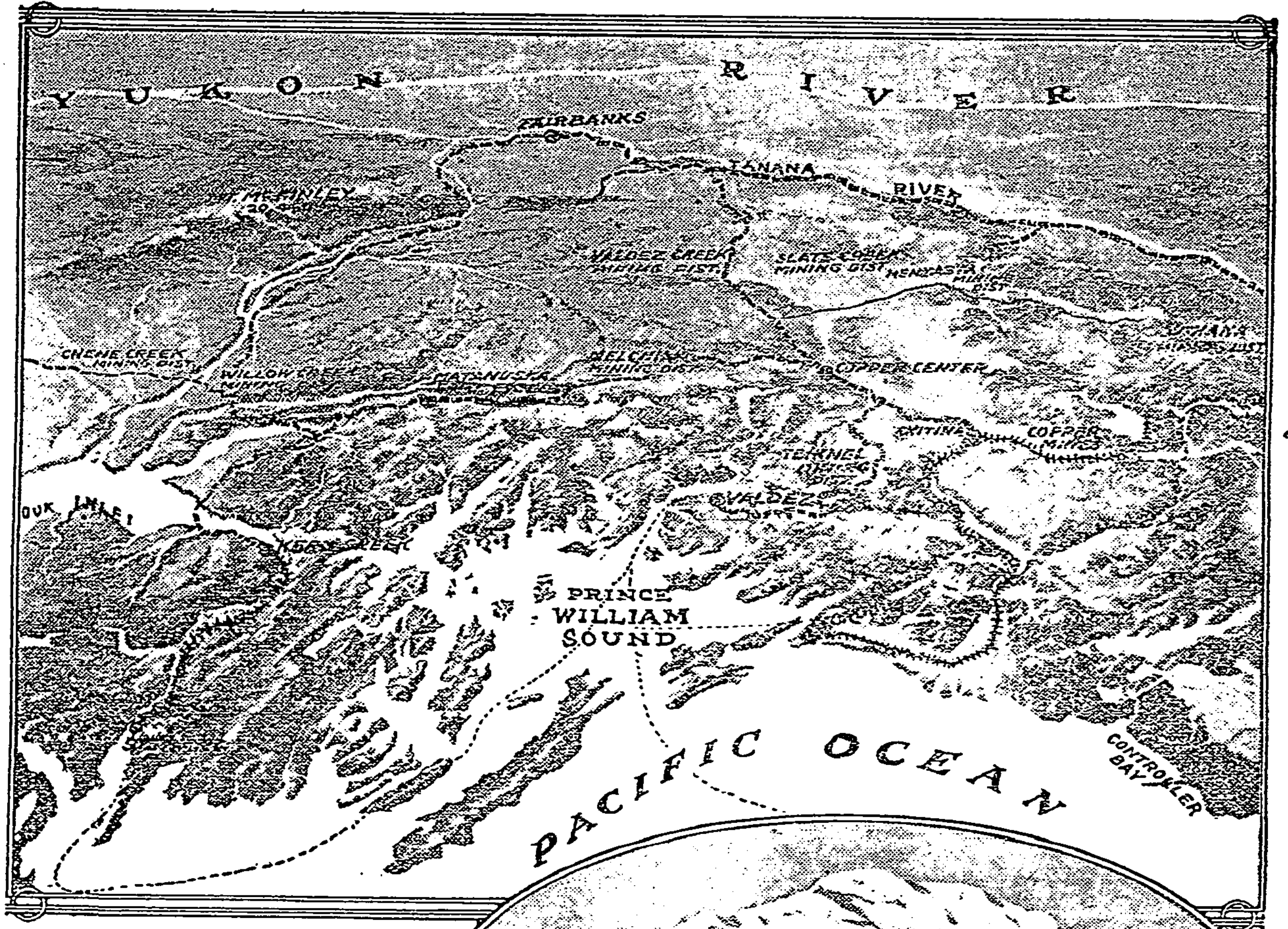
New Railroad Will Pass Great Mountain, a Part of Extensive National Park, Which Congress Has Been Asked to Create

AFTER hearing Stephen Mather of the Department of the Interior and James Wickersham, Delegate from Alaska in Congress, talk about that country and its future possibilities you almost think that one of the routine duties of the United States Ambassador at Petrograd ought to be to apologize to the Russians every other day or so for buying that peninsula for only seven million dollars. And what Mather and Wickersham are saying is what the sixty thousand people of the Territory and all the big game hunters and naturalists in the United States are thinking, and what all the traveling, sight-seeing world will gladly admit, say those who already know, as soon as the Federal Government is ready to invite the world to come and ride on its new railroad to the new Mount McKinley National Park.

The railroad, strictly a Government enterprise, is now under construction. A bill to set aside 2,200 square miles of the Alaska Range, the highest land on the continent, as a national park has just been introduced by Mr. Wickersham and is pending in Congress. But park and road should be considered together in making any forecast of what Alaska is going to mean to the country at large. The railroad, which starts at Seward, on the southern coast of the peninsula—the Gulf of Alaska—is to run north to Fairbanks, a distance of 400 miles, or almost half way to the shores of the Arctic. The primary, commercial purpose of the road is to provide an outlet for the products of the rich Tanana Valley but, plus that, it will make Mount McKinley, now not much more than a name except to a handful of explorers and hunters, as accessible as Yellowstone Park.

The line of the railway runs within a dozen or fifteen miles of the Alaska Range and parallel to it, and from Broad Pass, 200 miles from Seward on the railroad, will be easy going to the great McKinley, which dominates that range.

The railroad, at least to Broad Pass,



Map of Prince William Sound and Southern Alaska Showing Proposed Railroad Routes.

of America, and the Boone and Crockett Club.

Belmore Browne, the explorer and hunter, who has spent three years on Mount McKinley, has, in behalf of the department and of the Committee on Conservation of Forests and Wild Life of the Camp Fire Club, issued an appeal for the establishment of the park in which he says:

Here can still be seen the herds of wild game protected from man by the ruggedness of the country. Giant moose still stalk through the timber line valleys, herds of caribou move easily across the moss-covered hills, bands of white bighorn sheep are on the mountainsides, while at any time the powerful form of the grizzly bear may give the crowning touch to the wildness of the picture. But while the Mount McKinley region is the fountain head from which come the herds of game that supply the huge expanse of South Central Alaska, that fountain head is menaced. Civilization is closing in, and already sled loads of dead animals from the mountain country have reached the Fairbanks market. Unless a refuge is set aside in which the animals that remain can breed and rear their young unmolested they will soon follow the buffalo.

The new railroad, Mr. Browne adds, will bring Mount McKinley within three weeks travel of New York City, which is another way of saying that the sled loads of dead animals will become a great deal more numerous unless the Government is armed with protective park authority before the sale of railway tickets begins.

There may still be some hunting, greatly restricted and regulated, even after the region has become a national park, for in the introduction of his bill Delegate Wickersham had two things to consider—the wishes of the Interior Department, with which he is in entire sympathy, and the desires of the people of Alaska, who are prospectors and don't want to be shut out of 2,200 square miles of mountain country in which they think they may find more gold.

There is no fear that the mining and hunting privilege will be a menace to the region as a park. "As a matter of fact," said Robert Sterling Yard, who is associated with Mr. Mather in all national park matters, "we do not expect the mining operations to amount to much, for the evidence of the geological experts indicates that there is little gold in the



Mount McKinley.

region which is to be set apart. As to the game, we will have in Mount McKinley Park the repetition of the story of the Yellowstone, where there has not been a gun fired legally since 1872 and where there is more game now than before the coming of the white man, for now there are no Indian hunters. Cavalry patrols and ceaseless watching for poachers have made the Yellowstone a paradise for animals. McKinley is that now, always has been and, with the passage of this bill, always will be."

But the conservation of wild life, as important as that is, is but one of the objects which the Government has in view in the Alaska Range.

"Just assume for a moment," said Mr. Yard, "that the scenic supremacy of Mount McKinley and the conservation of its game are not, singly or together, sufficient justification for this park project, (which they are, of course,) and we still have a third reason, sufficient in itself, which justifies McKinley and all the other national parks of the country. These great reservations cannot be dismissed as merely recreational or sentimental, aesthetic or educational. They are all that, but, most important of all, they are economic. They constitute a great business asset, as such hitherto overlooked entirely by the country.

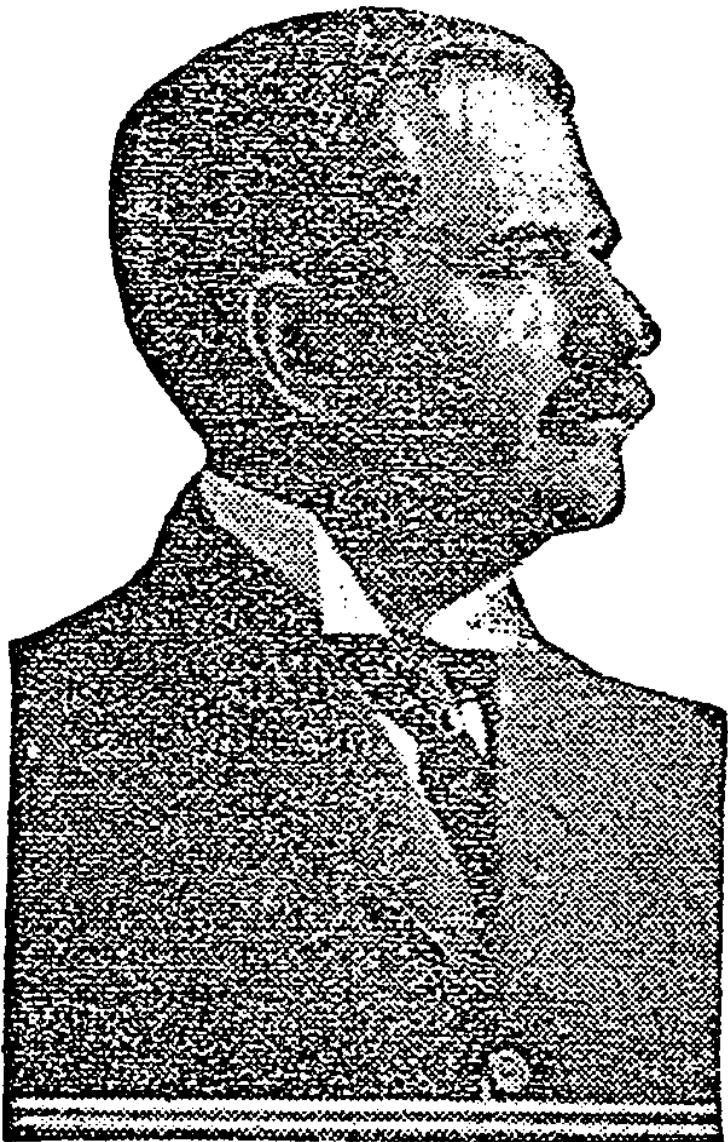
"Switzerland lives on her scenery. She has developed it scientifically into a business. She maintains tourist agencies and expensive publicity operations in every foreign country from which profitable income may be derived. She entertains the world. A few years ago Canada went into this same scenery business, combining American imagination and enterprise with British thoroughness. She advertised extensively and wisely, and today Switzerland and Canada share the scenic reputation of the world, also the

profits. The Alps and Lake Louise are their rival assets.

"But the assets of the United States for this same sort of enterprise are the best in the world. The difficulty in the necessary propaganda or educational work, or whatever you want to call it, is that this country's stock in trade is of such magnitude and such rare quality that if you even attempt to describe it adequately people won't believe you.

"So the Government sticks to the barest facts, tells the world that in its Glacier Park more than sixty glaciers, coming from cliffs thousands of feet high, feed hundreds of lakes, in one of which the icebergs last all Summer. And we let it go at that, not a single adjective, and it is the same way throughout the list of the eight national parks of the first order. But that may be the best way. Why should the United States try to embellish the fact that in its Sequoia National Park there are a million or more sequoia trees, twelve thousand of which are more than ten feet in diameter and some of them more than thirty-six feet? If I were not in the Government service I might simply say 'some trees.'

"In the park in the Alaska Range, when Congress turns it over to this department, the people of the United States will have the top notch of the scenery of the world in their own keeping for all time. Mount McKinley itself is more than 20,000 feet high. There are greater heights in the Himalayas, it is true, but they are not dominating because of the high average level of all about them. McKinley, on the contrary, is so isolated in its magnitude, so much greater than the rest of the range, that it presents the spectacle of a sheer rise of 17,000 feet. Furthermore, it is accessible, or soon will be. The Himalayas are not."



James Wickersham.
(© Harris & Ewing.)

will be ready for operation by the Summer of 1917, either by the Government itself or by private capital under Federal lease, a detail that has not yet been worked out, but the main point is to get Mount McKinley and the 2,200 square miles of surrounding country under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior as a national park before the stream of tourist travel is turned into the country over the new line. Otherwise there will be serious damage to one of the chief assets of the region, its present abundance of great game. So keen is the appreciation of this danger that Assistant Secretary Mather is being backed in his efforts to get the required legislation by the American Game Protective Association, the Camp Fire Club