

THE STRUGGLE TO BUILD A RAILROAD
TO COOKE CITY MONTANA

by

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Craig Edward Townsend

April 2013

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the all the “rails” at Stacy Yard and the Seattle Terminal Complex that encouraged me to continue my pursuit of education while earning my stripes as a “rail”. I am proud that you would consider me a fellow brother in the industry. The words of encouragement and motivation provided me with humor, and memories that will last a lifetime.

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ABSTRACT

The histories of Yellowstone National Park and Cooke City are closely tied to one another. In 1872, the United States created the first National Park, Yellowstone by an act of Congress. By 1876, the community of Cooke City, located near the Northeast corner of Yellowstone National Park, had developed into a mining community, but faced the major problem of providing cheap access to transportation. A railroad would provide cheap and easy transportation from Cooke City to the eastern markets. However, both Yellowstone National Park, and the mountainous terrain surrounded Cooke City and would plague the development of a railroad route. Between 1884 and 1894, the supporters of the Cooke City mines developed proposals to build a railroad to serve the mining community and petitioned Congress to grant a charter. The Northern Pacific railroad was among the corporations interested in developing a railroad to Cooke City. To access the mining community, four different railroad routes were proposed to be built. Out of the four different railroad routes, the route through Yellowstone National Park generated the most controversy. By examining primary source documents from the time frame including; newspapers, magazines, Congressional records and reports along with the corporate records of the railroad companies an in depth study of the railroad proposals was created and why the railroad was never constructed. By the middle of the 1890's the value of the mining claims was discovered to be less productive than first thought, and the railroad proposals slowly disappeared. To this date, no study has been done regarding the history of the Cooke City railroad developments. The railroad proposals not only developed the history of Cooke City, but also challenged the identity of the new national park and what conservation meant to Yellowstone National Park.

A RAILROAD FOR COOKE CITY?

The ring of the telephone in the store of W. T. Hall in Gardiner on February 29, 1885, caught the attention of the customers and loafers. The operator picked up the line from Livingston, and the garbled words "Secure that horse at once" came across the line. With a badly established connection to Livingston, the operator began to wonder who this message was being relayed to, and why. As the operator attempted to understand the message, the customers and loafers in the store begin to creep closer and closer to the telephone. A brief moment later, another message, "No wind at Livingston," caught the operator's ear. This second message raised even more eyebrows in the W. T. Hall store as so "manifestly mysterious and doubtful in its probability that it aroused the suspicion outside the circle for those whose benefit it was particularly intended."¹ With the suspicion of the community raised, the next morning when a group of riders mounted their horses, forty or fifty townspeople followed the galloping riders out of town.² This group of riders proceeded out of town, and began to stake claims on land outside of Gardiner leading to Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park. These select groups of Gardiner residents attempted to stake claims with the hope to strike it rich when a railroad finally made from Cinnibar to Gardiner and then on to Cooke City. Eventually, though February incident proved just another failed attempt to bring a railroad to Cooke City while lining the pockets of the local residents.

¹ "That Horse," *Livingston Enterprise*, February 21, 1885, 3.

² A.L., Haines, "Secure that Horse," *The Yellowstone Interpreter*, June 1, 1964, 29.

Yellowstone National Park & Cooke City

Starting with the discovery of gold in Cooke City, Montana, in 1876, the race to develop the mines of the New World Mining District was on. Similar to every other mining town, the life of Cooke City depended on removing and extracting as much of the natural resources from the ground as possible, and just as quickly moving the ore to a smelter where the gold and silver would be extracted. The purified ore could then be sold and shipped to eastern markets. With the development of western railroad expansion in the late 1800's, many mining camps across the Western United States could count on relatively cheap transportation.³ Cooke City, located high up in the Rocky mountain range, thus had one slight problem according to the miners: lack of cheap transportation. To fully develop the New World Mining district at a large scale, a railroad was a necessity. However, building a railroad to Cooke City faced big geographical and political problems: mountains to the north, west and the east, and a new national park called Yellowstone to the south. Either a railroad would have to be built northeastward through the 10,000 foot-high range, or cut south through the National Park. Between 1884 and 1894, various railroad proposals developed to pursue both routes.

For ten years, these railroad proposals garnered the attention of both the local communities of Gardiner, Cinnabar, and Cooke City, and the rest of the nation.

³ For further study of mining in the American West see: Thomas Arthur Rickard, *A History of American Mining*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1932); Rodman Paul, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848-1880*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001). For specific mining history on Cooke City see: Ralph Glidden, *Exploring the Yellowstone high country: a history of the Cooke City area* (XXX 19XX). For a brief history of Cooke City and the mining district see: Muriel Wolle, *Montana Pay Dirt: A Guide to the Mining Camps of the Treasure State*, (United States of America: Swallow Press, 1963); Robert Goss, *Pack Trains and Pay Dirt in Yellowstone: On the trail with Whispering George Huston*, (Bozeman: Insty-Prints, 2007). For a recent environmental mining history of Cooke City see: Janis Johnston, *Contested Terrain* (M.A. Thesis, University of Wyoming 1998).

Nevertheless, in the end, each attempt to reach Cooke City by railroad was met with dismal failure. Four different routes into Cooke City seemed viable over the decade, but only one won the sustained attention of the national press. Not surprisingly, the proposed line through the northern boundary of Yellowstone Park was the most controversial, and yet it seemed at various points very feasible. The three other options—the Stillwater, Clark’s Fork, and Rocky Fork routes—followed the respective rivers from the Yellowstone, near Billings, to the base of the Beartooth Mountains, and from there planned to circle the mountains to reach Cooke City. Had the iron horse reached the doorstep of Cooke City, would the district have developed into another Mother Lode rich with minerals? Regardless of the answer, there is little doubt that the years of struggle to develop a railroad left their mark on Cooke City, and helped identify and shape the role of national parks, and the preservation of the lands that were contained within the park boundaries.

The Northern Pacific and other private corporate railroad companies were interested in building a railroad line to Cooke City to reach the New World Mining District by the most favorable route. If that route was to be built through Yellowstone National Park, along the Soda Butte Creek, then the railroads deemed that the route was the most practical and economical. Although the Northern Pacific was interested in building a line through Yellowstone National Park as one of the options, the claims from the popular national magazine, *Forest and Stream*, that the Northern Pacific was attempting to land grab the park proved wrong. As the Northern Pacific was developing interests in Cooke City, the local citizens of Cinnabar, Cooke City, Livingston, and

Gardiner also attempted, and failed to create a smaller railroad operation to Cooke City. In the ten years that the Northern Pacific was interested in building a branch line to Cooke City, the mining promoters continued to push for a railroad. When the Northern Pacific in 1891 found the true value of the New World Mining District was less than the mining supporters claimed it to be, the Northern Pacific quickly lost interest in building a branch line to Cooke City. The Northern Pacific had many opportunities to build a line to Cooke City from various routes, but in the end, the known costs outweighed the possible benefits and a line was never constructed. Although the Northern Pacific was heavily involved in Yellowstone National Park through various proxy companies, the Northern Pacific initially believed that the mines of Cooke City had enough wealth to support a railroad based upon the claims of the mining supporters. The Northern Pacific was not attempting to use the railroad as a means for a land grab within the Park as suggested by their main opponent *Forest and Stream*. When the Northern Pacific learned about the true value of the New World Mining District was poor quality, low-grade ore, along with small deposits of concentrated ore, support for a railroad quickly died because the Northern Pacific was no longer interested in reaching Cooke City. If the Northern Pacific had truly been interested in building a railroad within Yellowstone National Park, as *Forest and Stream* claimed them to be, the company would surely have continued to lobby Congress for a right of way.

While the Northern Pacific and other railroad companies struggled to develop a railroad line to Cooke City, another battle began to simmer as well. Although Yellowstone National Park had been created in 1872, the role and legacy of this national

park had not been established. As the railroads struggled to gain access to Cooke City, a struggle over the identity and role of the national park developed along side. The railroad companies were directly challenging this new national symbol, and the identity of the park would be shaped by what transpired. The call of protection for the park came from George Bird Grinnell, and his nationally popular magazine, *Forest and Stream*. The protection of Yellowstone National Park as a wilderness preserve was challenged by the various railroad proposals into the parks boundaries.

Railroads Develop Across the Nation

The history of Cooke City and the development and history of Yellowstone National Park are closely related. The first National Park in the United States was Yellowstone National Park in 1872, located on the Yellowstone Plateau. This new National Park encompassed parts of the territories of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. A few years earlier in 1869, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroad companies completed building a new rail line that linked the state of California to the rest of the nation. Twenty-one years later on the heels of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific was the railroad line of James J. Hill of St Paul Minnesota, the Great Northern Railway. While the Central Pacific/Union Pacific line crossed the nation roughly around the 42nd parallel, the Hill line was planned and built on a northern route. The Great Northern Railroad started in St. Paul and worked its way across the nation roughly following the 48th parallel. The Great Northern was the fifth railroad to complete its journey across the west when it reached Seattle, Washington, in 1893. Jay Cooke's railroad company, the

Northern Pacific, was the third railway line across the west, completed in September of 1883. Although the route was north of the Central Pacific/Union Pacific line, the Northern Pacific railway line was roughly 100 to 200 miles south of the Great Northern line. The Northern Pacific line roughly followed the 46th -47th Parallel crossing through the southern part of the territory of Montana.⁴ Although the Northern Pacific line was financed in part by U.S. land grants, the charter for Cooke's railroad specified that the Northern Pacific was not able to build any branch lines during the construction. This resulted in the Northern Pacific creating front companies to establish branch lines off the main transcontinental route. When the Northern Pacific reached, Livingston, Montana, in 1882 plans began to develop to build a branch line from the Northern Pacific mainline at Livingston towards the north entrance of Yellowstone National Park.⁵

With the discovery of ore, including gold, in 1874 in south central Montana, near the present day location of Cooke City, financiers and prospectors begin to look for an easy way to transport the mined ore out of the mountainous region. After a brief visit by Jay Cooke to the New World Mining District, plans to build a railroad gained momentum. Two major obstacles—the Beartooth Mountains, and Yellowstone National Park—continually undermined both the rumors and the serious efforts to build a railroad. Nonetheless, between 1884 and 1894, numerous proposals were put forth to build a

⁴ While the Northern Pacific and Great Northern constructed rail lines across the northern territories of the United States, the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP), and Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF) constructed lines along the southern routes. The SP was the second railroad to complete construction across the west in January of 1883. The AT&SF was the fourth transcontinental railroad to see completion during the middle of the 1880's.

⁵ For further study of America's transcontinental railroads see: Richard White, *Railroaded The Transcontinental's and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 2011; James Vance, *The North American Railroad* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), 1995; John Stover *Life and decline of the American Railroad* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1970.

railroad from either the western approach (through the park), or from the eastern approach (through the Beartooth Mountains).

The mines surrounding the present day town site of Cooke City were discovered in 1869 by four trappers; “Adam “Horn” Miller, Bart Henderson, J. H. Moore, and James Gourley (Gowsley).”⁶ Shortly after finding signs of ore, the party encountered Indians who “rode into their camp and ran off with their horses.”⁷ The area remained untouched until 1874, when another prospecting party attempted to find the finds from five years prior. By 1876, miners in the area had extracted enough ore to which the Eastern Montana Mining & Smelting Company, located in Cooke City, “successfully reduced eighty tons of silver-lead ore to thirty tons of bullion in 1877” in Cooke City.⁸ These small but promising successes in the New World Mining District eventually reached the ears of Jay Cooke Jr., son of the Northern Pacific financier. In the spring 1880, Cooke made plans to visit the New World Mining District. When he finally arrived in June, “the land was still blanketed with up to ten feet of snow.”⁹ After the miners happily shoveled away the snow, Cooke “examined the mines, and seemed ‘*highly pleased with the property.*’”¹⁰ After quickly putting down a five thousand dollar deposit to secure his holdings in the mines, Cooke promised, “to do what he could to bring a railroad into

⁶ Muriel Wolle, *Montana Pay Dirt: A Guide to the Mining Camps of the Treasure State*, (United States of America: Swallow Press, 1963), 389.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. This claim of reducing thirty tons of bullion in 1877 suggested that the veins surrounding Cooke City were rich in mineral wealth. As would be later discovered by the Northern Pacific that such veins of high quality ore were far and few between. Most of the ore quality in the New World Mining District was of low quality.

⁹ Robert Goss, *Pack Trains and Pay Dirt in Yellowstone: On the trail with Whispering George Huston*, (Bozeman: Insty-Prints, 2007), 49.

¹⁰ Ibid. Italics in original.

town.”¹¹ To express their thanks and support for the proposed railroad, the miners renamed the town site for Cooke, and it was shortly after surveyed and platted.¹² This brief mention of a railroad marked the beginning of what would be an epic ten-year battle to build a railroad to Cooke City.

News of a Railroad

On September 1, 1883, the *Livingston Daily Enterprise* recorded “an event of no little interest in the despatch [*sic*] of the first through train on the National Park branch of the N.P.R.R., a consummation much desired.”¹³ The article highlighted the survey made by the Northern Pacific in April of 1882, which included a line through the national park.¹⁴ The *Livingston Daily Enterprise* praised the hard work of Northern Pacific, which will enable the “growth and prosperity” of the Paradise River valley.¹⁵ In the same edition of the paper, another article reported the possibility that the Park Branch line may not be permanently terminating at Cinnibar, but continue further eastward towards the Clark Fork Mines.¹⁶ The *Enterprise* suggested, “the mines of the wonderfully productive

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. “The townsite was to be a ¼ mile wide, lying along Soda Butte Creek in the narrow defile between Miller and Henderson mountains on the north and Republic mountain on the south... ‘*About 35 men and one women* [italics in original]’ lived in the new town of Cooke City.

¹³ “Finale of Construction on the National Park Branch,” *The Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Morning Edition, September 3, 1883, 2. The Park Branch referred to the line constructed between Livingston, and Cinnibar to provide access to Yellowstone National Park at the north entrance at Gardiner. The line in 1903 would finally reach the three miles from Cinnibar to Gardiner.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The area surrounding the community of Cooke City, is referred to in various newspapers, congressional documents, and times as; Clark’s Fork Mining District, New World Mining District, New World Gulch Mining District, and Cooke or Cook City. Throughout this paper, the terms used will reflect the names used by the primary source document. Regardless of the term used in the primary source document, the terms discuss the current community of Cooke City, Montana, which is located near the Northeastern boundary of Yellowstone National Park.

. . . Clark's Fork region are also a loadstone which will attract to them a railroad sooner or later."¹⁷ While speculative, the *Enterprise* article mentioned two features of this proposed railroad; first that the railroad would be built to a non-standard gauge, and secondly that the Northern Pacific "will not willing permit any company which it does not control to build and operate a road within the park."¹⁸ The *Enterprise* reported that the railroad will be "built to an odd gauge (four feet is mentioned)" this would not necessarily prevent the proposed railroad in the future from widening the gauge to the standard gauge of 4 feet 8 ½ inches. The standard narrow gauge lines constructed and operated during the later half of the 19th Century had a gauge of 3 feet to allow a narrower right of way, of which less rockwork, fills, and cuts would be required, which in theory made the locomotives and rolling stock smaller and, thus making the railroad cheaper to construct initially. By the end of the 19th Century, many narrow gauge lines began the process of widening the track gauge to the standard 4 feet 8 ½ inches. A four-foot gauge is certainly an odd size for this proposed railroad to choose, and as Aubrey Haines argues in *The Yellowstone Story* that the odd gauge line was a "specious arrangement considering the relative ease with which track gauge could be changed."¹⁹

The suggestion that the Northern Pacific would not let another railroad company build to Cooke City indicated to the editors of the *Enterprise* that the Northern Pacific executives wanted to build a railroad themselves via a proxy company, which they would

¹⁷ "No Title," *The Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Morning Edition, September 3, 1883, 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Aubrey Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park*, Vol. 2, (Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone Library and Museum Association in Cooperation with Colorado University Press) 1977, 34.

control.²⁰ While the *Daily Enterprise* supported a railroad to Cooke City, twelve days later on September 3 the editors began to wonder if mines of Cooke City were as rich as the miners and “clique of capitalists” claimed them to be. The richness of the mines surrounding Cooke City that from “time to time” claimed to be the latest mother lode had provided “no evidence of the fact that the greatest wealth exists.”²¹ The various claims of the fabulous richness of the mining district continued to hinder various railroad proposals throughout the next ten years. The uncertainty of mining district provided fuel for both optimism and pessimism. This fluctuating boom and bust of the mining district closely paralleled the boom and busts of railroad developments to serve the New World Mining District. As quickly as a proposal for a railroad made news in the *Daily Enterprise*, it soon after faded into the unconsciousness of the press. Not until December of 1883, would reports of a railroad to Cooke City surface again, but these too would soon turn out to be just another unfounded rumor.²² The *Enterprise* simply reported,

persons in Washington now, it is said, are working in the interest of a company which proposes to run a railroad through the park. The privilege to transport ore from the Clark’s Fork mines...will be sought of congress...There is reason to believe that any plan which contemplates construction of a railroad through the park limits will meet with opposition in congress; if not in the house, certainly in the senate.

With little hope for a railroad in 1883, the miners and citizens of Cinnibar and Cooke City looked forward to 1884 to bring the iron horse to the mines of Cooke City.

²⁰ The Northern Pacific charter to build a railroad line did not allow the Northern Pacific to directly finance or construct branch lines. The Northern Pacific was able to develop branch lines through the continued use of proxy companies.

²¹ “Depreciating Mines,” *The Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Morning Edition, September 15, 1883, 2.

²² “Yellowstone Park to Have a New Superintendent—A Railroad to Clark’s Fork,” *The Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Evening Edition, December 20, 1883, 2.

A new year and new rumors of a railroad once again reached the citizens of the neighboring Gallatin and Paradise Valleys. On January 5, *The Livingston Daily Enterprise* reported, “that a project to build a narrow gauge railroad...at Cinnibar to Cooke City has not been forgotten.”²³ According to the *Enterprise* Jay Cooke was one of the men pushing behind the proposal. The *Bozeman Avant Courier* on January 31, 1884, broke the news to the residents of Gallatin Valley of the possibility of a railroad reaching into the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park. G. E. Hobart, superintendent of the Northwest Improvement Company, and Northern Pacific subsidiary, according to the *Avant Courier*, “wishes to obtain the passage of a law granting the right of way through the National Park for a branch road from Northern Pacific to Clarke’s Fork, in Montana, to afford an [sic] outlet for the rich mines in that region.”²⁴ Buried on the third page of the newspaper, the *Avant Courier* story was also breaking the news from Washington that two days prior territorial delegate to the House of Representatives Martin Maginnis of Montana had introduced a bill that would establish a railroad to Cooke City. The bill was a single page, in which a railroad called “Cinnabar and Clark’s Fork Railroad Company” (C. C. F. R. R. Co.) would be granted a right of way from Cinnabar to the Clark’s Fork Mining District.²⁵ The bill did not specify a length or route, or width of a right of way for the proposed railroad, nor clearly identify who was backing the project. By February 4th, amendments to the bill began to clarify the proposed route to the Clark Fork Mining

²³ "Railroad to Cooke City," *The Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Evening edition, January 5, 1884, 2.

²⁴ "Another Northern Pacific Branch," *Bozeman Avant Courier*, January 31, 1884, 1. The Northwest Improvement Company was under proxy control of the Northern Pacific Railway. The Northwest Improvement Company controlled the hotels, concessions, and transportation within Yellowstone National Park.

²⁵ Congress, Senate, *A Bill Granting the Right of Way to the Cinnibar and Clark’s Fork Railroad Company to connect the North Pacific Railroad with the Clark’s Fork mines*, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., *Congressional Record*, (January 29, 1884): H.R. 4363.

District, indicating it would “follow the Yellowstone River to its junction with the East Fork of said river, thence by the way of East Fork to the Soda Butte Creek, thence by the said creek to the Clark’s Fork Mining District.”²⁶ To persons familiar with the geography of the area it would have been apparent that the bill was proposing that a right of way go through Yellowstone National Park. On February 14, the C. C. F. R. R. Co. was officially incorporated by the State of Montana.²⁷ The U.S. Senate Committee on Railroads reported on the proposed Senate bill S. 1373 on the 27th and recommended its passage. In support of the bill, a report on the proposed route was appended, including a variety of petitions from the citizens of Cooke City, Cinnibar, and Livingston, which “strongly urg[ed] that Congress grant a right of way.”²⁸ With a right of way suggested through the Park, the proposed route estimated to be only a distance of about fifty miles. A railroad line that left Cooke City to the north, outside the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park, would have to run one hundred and nineteen miles to the north of Cooke City, either crossing over or around the mountainous terrain to reach the Northern Pacific mainline near Billings, Montana, the next closest railroad connection.²⁹ Compared to the fifty-mile line through the national park, a line built to the south of Cooke City would require a line three hundred and eighty four miles in length to reach a Union Pacific Railroad connection.³⁰ Thus to Senate Bill 1373 supports, the only logical route to Cooke

²⁶Congress, Senate, *A Bill Granting the Right of Way to the Cinnibar and Clark’s Fork Railroad Company*, 48th Congress, 1st Session, *Congressional Record*, (February 4, 1884): S. 1373, Report No. 239.

²⁷ Montana Secretary of State, "Business Entity Search," Accessed February 10, 2013, https://app.mt.gov/cgi-bin/bes/besCertificate.cgi?action=detail&bessearch=D000258&trans_id=besa130220450184e1600.

²⁸ Senate Committee on Railroads, *Report to Accompany Bill S. 1373*, Report prepared by Mr. Sawyer, 48th Congress, 1st Session, 1884, Report Number 239.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

City was through Yellowstone National Park. Henry Gannett of the United States Geological Survey noted in a letter dated February 19 that “the road proposed is the only one practical to reach those mine” Further, Gannett concluded, “In my judgment, a railroad on this route cannot injure the Park as a pleasure resort.”³¹ Without a National Park boundary in the way, the route to Cinnibar would have been the preferred choice. However, Gannett’s confident statement notwithstanding, the National Park would not be an easy obstacle to overcome for the supporters of the C. C. F. R. R. Co.

The supporters of the railroad to Cooke City observed that a railroad would obviously reduce the cost of transportation of ore from the mines and stimulate increased production of the mining district. The current cost of transportation using the wagon road from Cooke City to Cinnibar, was more than the subsequent cost of moving the ore “from Cinnibar to New York City.”³² The Congressional report continued by saying that more than three hundred mining claims had been staked in the Cooke City area, but because of the cost of the transportation to Cinnibar, the claims remained unproductive. Further, the report concluded that the proposed railroad would not damage the park because it “would be practically only a business road (for mining), affording but little, if any, accommodation to tourists who would find upon its line no objects of interest to attract their attention.”³³ The opponents to the railroad bill argued that the railroad line would create damage not only to the forest, and to game of the Park, but would also end with the destruction of tourist sites. The argument from the Committee report suggested that if any

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

destruction were to occur along the right of way through the Park, it would not affect the tourists travel or experience through the National Park.

The amendments to the Senate bill with the clear proposal of a route through the park quickly attracted concerns from defenders of the Yellowstone preserve.³⁴ Supporters of the park, including the editorial staff at *Forest and Stream*, including George Bird Grinnell, began a public relations campaign by publishing letters and articles calling for the protection of the park from railroads.³⁵ On March 15, *Forest and Stream* published a letter from Arnold Hague, another USGS geologist, noting that:

it seems to me it should be the policy of the government, in the management of the Park, to protect above everything else the timber and game. If this view is correct then the admission of the railways with in the Park should be prohibited. Nothing would tend more to destroy the timber by fire than the passage of trains through the forest. Moreover, the locomotive whistle and the additional traffic caused by the railway transportation would convey the place into a public highway and tend to destroy all aspects of a Park. It would most effectually drive out all large game.³⁶

³⁴ As the Cinnabar and Clark's Fork Railroad was reported in Congress, another railroad bill was introduced. Although not connected to the mining district of Cooke City, the railroad bill proposed granting a right of way through various parts of Yellowstone National Park. This railroad had the name: Yellowstone Park Railroad Company. House Report 5715 gave the Yellowstone Park Railroad Company a specific right of way from the Upper Geyser Basin, to the Lower Geyser Basin, connecting to the Northern Pacific railroad at "the most available point." This proposed railroad was entirely independent of the Cinnabar and Clark's Fork Railroad as the Yellowstone Park Railroad was to be located much further south than practical to reach the mines of Cooke City. Having two proposed railroads entering Yellowstone Park within the span of only a few months garnered the attention of the national press, including *Forest and Stream*. This bill also changed the boundaries of the Park, expanding the Park to the East, and South.

³⁵ *Forest and Stream*, behind the editorial leadership of George Bird Grinnell, spread the news of the railroad development to readers across the nation. *Forest and Stream* was not the only national press reporting on this issue. *Forest and Stream* was a weekly magazine production out of New York City. The exact readership numbers are unknown. The *Washington Post*, and *New York Times*, both covered the railroad legislation as well, but did not publish the same volume of articles that *Forest and Stream* was able to produce. In many articles both newspapers quoted *Forest and Stream* as being the authoritative voice on the issue of the railroad proposals and the Yellowstone National Park.

³⁶ Arnold Hague, "Letter 2," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, March 13, 1884, 7.

Forest and Stream continued to press for the vetoing of all the railroad bills in Congress in another article in the same issue. The editors expressed their opinion that the railroad bills will undo “the good work that has been accomplished by Senator Vest and others.”³⁷ Missouri Senator George Vest was a strong supporter of Yellowstone National Park, and the various Senate bills regarding the protection of Yellowstone from both railroad interests, and for general park protection. In May, when the bill was finally discussed on the floor of the Senate, continued his quest to protect Yellowstone National Park.

Three days later the House of Representatives Committee on Pacific Railroads reported favorably on the House version of the bill, H.R. 6083. The house committee report further fleshed out some of the details that worried the park supporters. Estimations of the Yellowstone route calculated it to be fifty miles in length, and the House Report estimated that some forty miles of this would be within the boundaries of the National Park. The committee noted as well that the Northern Pacific had conducted a preliminary survey through the Crow Reservation that would leave the Northern Pacific railhead near Billings, but the Northern Pacific deemed it “impractical” to reach Cooke City according to the Committee.³⁸ The report also mentioned that the current wagon-based freight costs were about “2 cents in summer to 4 cents in winter per pound.”³⁹ Oddly, though, the report makes no mention of what the cost of freight would be if a

³⁷ Vest’s role in helping save the National Park is outlined in H. Daune Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry Saved our National Parks* (United States of America: Indiana University Press, 1971). The above reference from *Forest and Stream* suggested that if the railroad bill were to pass through Congress, than Senator Vest’s work since 1882 would have been worthless. “Yellowstone Park Matters,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, March 13, 1884, 7.

³⁸ The Committee on Pacific Railroads, *Cinnibar and Clark’s Fork Railroad Company*, report prepared by Hanback, 48th Congress, 1st Session, 1884, Report 832.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 1. The current cost of transportation of ore from Cooke City to Cinnibar was more than “it does from Cinnibar to New York City.”

railroad existed. In a seemingly contradictory statement, the committee concluded, “it would not be advisable to permit the construction of a railroad” within the boundaries of the National Park.⁴⁰ The House Committee continued with its finding that “a railroad, if constructed would necessarily follow substantially the same course” as the current wagon road and the impacts on game and wild life would be no greater than the current impact from “the wagon teams.”⁴¹ The claim that the impact of the railroad on the Park would be minimal was an attempt to justify the expense to build the line to Cooke City. However, when the bill was brought up for debate on the Senate floor on March 27, the leading opponent against the bill, Senator Vest, still had enough reservations to vote against it.

Senators Vest and John Logan, of Illinois, proceeded to lead a raging debate on the Senate floor against the railroad bill and Senator Philetus Sawyer of Wisconsin, a supporter of the railroad bill. The debate started off with a simple request by Senator Omar Conger of Michigan to amend the Senate bill in an attempt to bring a balance between the Park supporters and the railroad supporters. The proposed amendment quickly turns into a full debate about not only the merits of building a railroad to Cooke City, but also the protection and preservation of the National Park.⁴² Conger’s

⁴⁰ Ibid, 2.

⁴¹ Ibid, 2.

⁴² In his authoritative two-volume set, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park*, former park historian Aubrey Haines discussed at length the proposed railroad bill. According to Haines, the Northern Pacific had spent the winter of 1883-84 lobbying Congress for a right of way and was actively involved with the railroad proposals. Although Haines discussed the problems associated with a railroad within the park, and the opposition to the railroad from Senators Logan and Vest who believed that the railroad to the mines was a mere cover to simply gain access to the Park, Haines did not fully develop a complete history of the railroad proposals. Prior to Haine’s examination of the railroad bill, Hiram Chittenden, the park’s earliest historian had only briefly mentioned the railroad proposal in his 1918 editions of *The Yellowstone National Park*. In that edition, Chittenden argued that a formidable danger

amendment would limit the width of the right of way of the railroad to one hundred feet, and allow the railroad to build the necessary buildings for “the use of its employees.” The company would be restricted from erecting “any hotel, boarding-house, or building” other than specifically mentioned.”⁴³ Although Conger was steadfastly against the bill, he argued that these amendments would provide some protection to the park and yet still allow a railroad to be constructed. Conger’s opinion was that if the mines of Cooke City were as productive as they claimed to be, the miners have the rights to “find an outlet for their ores and to carry on their business.”⁴⁴ Conger’s comments suggested that if the National Park had not existed as a reserve for the public, then the right of way for the railroad would be an easy and logical choice. Changing the width of the right of way to fifty feet on each side of the centerline would prevent the railroads from making both a land grab in the National Park, and minimize impacts on countryside and landscape.⁴⁵

existed to the Park, and that Cooke City had leaded the charge against the Park. In the 1949, and 1964 revised editions of *The Yellowstone National Park* all mention of the railroad proposals and Cooke City had been edited out. Historian Richard Bartlett devoted part of a chapter in *Yellowstone: A wilderness Besieged* to the railroad proposals to Cooke City, and discussed the railroad proposals as damaging to the environmental beauty of Yellowstone. However, Bartlett left out any mention of the supporters of the railroad, and whether the Northern Pacific had corporate interests with the railroad. Throughout Bartlett’s work, he claims that the identity of the national park was challenged by the introduction of the automobile into the park. Bartlett ignores the legacy that had been created by the challenges of the railroads to Yellowstone National Park identity. For further study of Yellowstone National Park’s complex political, economical, and environmental history -see; Aubrey Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park*, 2 vols. (Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone Library and Museum Association in Cooperation with Colorado University Press) 1977; Hiram Marin Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park: Historical and Descriptive* (Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd) 1915; Louis Cramton, *Early History of Yellowstone National Park and Its Relation to National Park Policies* (Washington D.C.: U.S. National Park Service) 1932; Richard Bartlett, *Yellowstone: A Wilderness Besieged*, (Tucson, University of Arizona Press) 1989; Daniel Barringer, *Selling Yellowstone: Capitalism and the Construction of Nature.*, (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas) 2002; Mary Shiver Culpin, “For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People,” *A History Of Concession Development in Yellowstone National Park, 1872-1966*, (Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone Center for Resources) 2003; Chris Magoc, *Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of an American Landscape, 1870-1903*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press) 1999.

⁴³ Congress, Senate, 48th Congress, 1st Session, *Congressional Record*, May 27, 1884, 4547.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 4558.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 4548.

During the debate, a question regarding the standard width of the right of way was questioned. The standard right of way for railroad land grants was one hundred feet from the centerline of the right of way for a total of a two hundred foot right of way.⁴⁶ Conger's amendment cut the right of way in half, and therefore limited the construction of unnecessary buildings, such as machine shops, roundhouses, and any other outbuildings that could injure the Park.

Senator Vest led the charge against the railroad in the Park, not because he believed the mines of Cooke City had little value, but because Vest suggested that the railroad scheme was just another attempt to monopolize the National Park by corporate interests. Vest introduced the idea that the mines of Cooke City have developed access from the north, bypassing the Park completely. The proof for the feasibility of the northern line existed, according to Vest, in a letter received by General Sheridan.

Sheridan submitted the matter [to know if another route to Cooke City existed] to an engineer officer who had made a survey in the northern direction from Cooke City to the Northern Pacific Railway up Boulder Creek, and this officer replied that it was entirely feasible to construct a railroad upon that route without touching the Yellowstone Park at all.⁴⁷

No mention of the specific route this northerly route would take was offered, other than it would reach the Northern Pacific railhead near Billings, Montana. Nor is there any mention of the cost of construction, or the length of the railroad line.

The Congressional debate also discussed the possibility that the Northern Pacific was behind the construction of the park branch, as Senator Charles Van Wyck of

⁴⁶ Although the standard width of the right of way was one hundred feet on either side of the centerline, Congress changed the right of way widths for each individual railroad. The Northern Pacific right of way was granted at four hundred feet, or two hundred feet on either side of the centerline.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 4549.

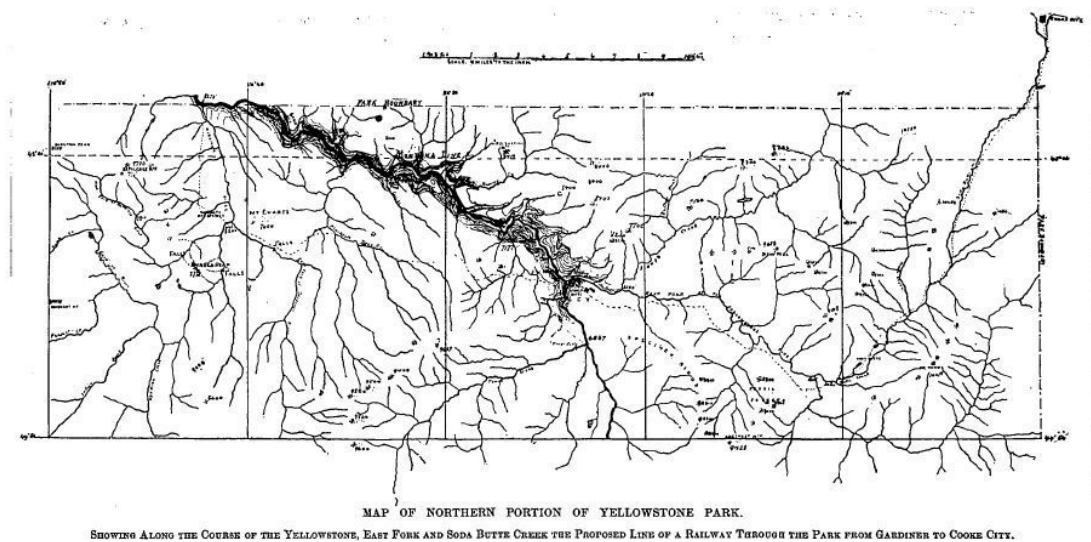


Figure 1 Map showing the location of the proposed route through Yellowstone National Park. *Forest and Stream*.

Nebraska makes this assumption based upon the terminus of the Northern Pacific at Cinnibar. Senator Van Wyck asked, “I take it that it is not disputed that this road is a branch of the Northern Pacific railroad?” To which Conger responds by saying that “I understand, and I think the committee did, that this is an independent road, entirely distinct from the Northern Pacific Railroad.” Van Wyck responds by questioning the legality of the Northern Pacific branch line already constructed from Livingston to Cinnibar, by pointing out that “these branches are under the cover of another organization of their own creation.”⁴⁸ This implication from Senator Van Wyck would continue to trouble the railroad proposals to Cooke City for years to come because of the implied connections with the Northern Pacific Railroad.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 4552,

While both the Senate and House bills remained similar in text, Senator Logan was able to win passage of the amendment to Senate Bill 1373, which includes a clause that “if any route can be found...over which a railroad can be constructed without passing through any part of the said park”⁴⁹ it is to be so constructed instead of the Park route. This amendment seemed to ease, but not eliminate, opposition to the passage of the bill in the Senate. Because neither side was willing to compromise further to enact and pass the Cinnibar and Clark’s Fork Railroad bill, it quietly died in the 48th Congress. Nonetheless, the *Livingston Daily Enterprise* and the *Bozeman Avant Courier* continued to press for the passage of the bill. The *Daily Enterprise* called Vest a “chronic objector, a jack-in-the-box who pops up with a discordant cry on all occasions.”⁵⁰ In June, the *Daily Enterprise* continued its quips towards Senator Vest, arguing that the northern route through the Boulder valley would be a waste and impractical to build. The Livingston paper reported, “we have never met any man who went over the Boulder route. We have never heard of any person entering or leaving the Clark’s Fork district by way of the Boulder valley.”⁵¹ News of a railroad died down considerably through 1885, until the opening of the 49th Congress.

⁴⁹ Congress, Senate, *Amendment*, 48th Congress, 1st Session, S, 1373, *Congressional Record*, (May 27, 1884): Amendment to S. 1373.

⁵⁰ “No Title,” *The Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Evening Edition, May 5, 1884, 2.

⁵¹ “No Title,” *The Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Evening Edition, June 3, 1884, 2.

NEW RAILROADS AND NEW ROUTES FOR COOKE CITY

The resurrection of a new railroad bill came during the 49th Congress in January 1886. During the course of the year, many new developments would unfold regarding a railroad line to Cooke City. In addition, the battle in Congress would witness a hard fight to grant a right of way to the promoters of a railroad. On January 2, the *Livingston Daily Enterprise* broke the news that Montana territorial delegate Joseph Toole would be introducing a bill for a Clark's Fork and Cinnibar railroad "at first opportunity."⁵² Five days later, Toole would prove true to his word by introducing House Resolution 2881.⁵³ Meanwhile in the Senate, Senator Samuel McMillian from the state of Minnesota was introducing a similar bill for authorization to grant a right of way through Yellowstone National Park.⁵⁴ *Forest and Stream* immediately noticed the two bills and began to criticize them before they even made it out of their respective committees.

The editors of *Forest and Stream* continued their previous arguments that a railroad would be destructive to the beauty and wildlife of the park. In an attempt to sensationalize the battle, the editors claimed, "it is not generally known that the Park has already been overrun by surveyors, acting in the interests of various railway

⁵² "No Title," *The Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Morning Edition, January 2, 1886, 2.

⁵³ Congress, House, Representative Toole introducing H.R. 2881, H.R. 2881, 49th Cong., 1st Sess., *Congressional Record*, (January 7, 1886): 529.

⁵⁴ Congress, Senate, Senator McMillian, 49th Cong., 1st Sess., *Congressional Record*, (January 11, 1886): 568. There was some question regarding where the bill was to go too; the Committee on Territories or the Committee on Railroads. McMillian wanted the bill directly referred to the Committee on Railroads, while Senator Harrison believed that the Committee on Territories has already reported on this bill. McMillian replied that this bill was different from the previous bills that had passed through Congress in prior sessions. The wording on the bill varied very little from the 48th Congress bill (S. 1373).

companies.”⁵⁵ Although the editors of *Forest and Stream* suspected that the Northern Pacific had interests involved in the railroad bills, it was hard for them to prove how much. *Forest and Stream* continued to believe that another route to Cooke City would provide the access the miners so desperately wanted.

The House Committee on Public Lands, reported on February 23 a favorable response to the railroad bill in spite of the opposition by the Park supporters. The House Report Number 672, *Cinnibar and Clark's Fork Railroad Company to accompany bill H. R. 5880*, began to further flesh out some of the details surrounded the productivity and richness of the mines in Cooke City. By 1886, five hundred mining claims had been located and three smelters were in partial operation in the New World Mining District and processing the ore in preparation for transportation to the eastern markets.⁵⁶ The House Committee reported that “three smelters were in partial operation” these smelters would be abandoned if a means of easy transportation outside the mining district was not quickly secured.⁵⁷ The committee also reported an

experimental shipment of about 150 tons of ores from the...mines at Cooke City, was made to Omaha, the nearest reduction works. The ores averaged \$112.50. The cost of reduction was \$16 per ton and the transportation was \$92 per ton, giving the miner \$4.50 per ton to cover mining and other expenses. With railroad facilities, the total transportation would not have exceeded \$45 per ton.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ "No Railroad in Yellowstone Park," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, February 18, 1886, 4.

⁵⁶ House Committee on Public Lands, *Cinnibar and Clark's Fork Railroad Company*, Report by Mr. Payson, 49th Congress, 1st Session, 1886, House Report No. 672, 2

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

The report also noted that at its southern most point, the railroad would only reach “a point 6, and not exceeding 7, miles below the northern boundary.”⁵⁹ To protect the interests of the Park, the right of way would be one hundred feet in total width.

Introduced in the report was a letter from retired General Anderson, chief engineer of the Northern Pacific. In the excerpt of the letter, Anderson refuted the northern approach to Cooke City, and claimed that it is “doubtful if a road could be operated except at (such) an expense far beyond any possible return on cost.”⁶⁰ The grade proposed by the northern route, according to Anderson would reach 150 feet or more per mile or a 2.8% grade.⁶¹ Although a railroad could traverse a grade of that magnitude, it would be so steep that it would limit the tonnage hauled by the locomotives. The Northern Pacific and other railroad companies tried to limit the grades under 2 % or approximately 100 feet per mile.⁶² The other option, the Clark Fork River route, according to Anderson had grades exceeding 200 feet per mile.⁶³ Neither option seemed practical from an engineering perspective, at least in Anderson’s views, so that left the

⁵⁹ Ibid, 1.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁶¹ Ibid, 3. F. Lavis, *Railroad Location Surveys and Estimates*, (Chicago: The Myron C. Clark Publishing Co. 1908). “Grades are spoken in terms of feet per mile, especially in European practice, but in America this practice is becoming obsolete, and the common usage is to express them in feet per hundred or per cent. This method is advantageous in that it may be applied to any system of measurement, whether metric or any other, and always expresses the same ratio of rise or fall, and conveys that same impression of rate to the mind whatever the unit may be.”

⁶² Ibid, 105, 177-178. “While good alignment is very essential, and no pains should be spared to obtain the best possible, the fact must never be lost sight of that grades are equally, if not more important; in fact, they are almost invariably the chief factors in the cost of operation, and require the most careful study to eliminate unnecessary rise and fall, and to avoid steeper ruling grades than the country necessitates.” On page 177-178 Lavis further develops his engineering reasons for why the ruling grades should be as shallow as possible.

⁶³ Approximately a 3.78% grade. In neither option, did General Anderson specify the route in which the railroad would take.

only feasible route to Cooke City as up the Yellowstone River from Cinnibar through the national park.

The committee report continued with the argument that the government legally recognized the Clark's Fork mining district, and therefore the government, in good faith towards the miners, should provide reasonable access for the miners to transport and ship their ore. When the area surrounding the Clark's Fork mining district was first discovered to have mining wealth, the land was part of the reservation for the Crow Indians. It was not until 1882 that Congress removed the land from the Crow reservation, and placed it back as public land.⁶⁴ The C. C. F. R. R. Co. would have three years to complete construction of the line, or otherwise forfeit the right of way after Congress passed the bill into law.⁶⁵ As the Senate bill worked its way through the Committee and was placed on the calendar for debate, *Forest and Stream* once again took up the mission to repeal the legislation. When the Committee on Railroads reported to the Senate regarding the status of the bill on March 9, it raised an interesting discussion between Senator Conger, and Senator Sawyer. Senator Dwight Sabin of Minnesota noted that the Committee on Railroads reported on S. 980 and the bill placed on the calendar for debate, Senator Conger raised the question regarding if the bill was "granting a right of way through the Yellowstone National Park."⁶⁶ Senator Sabin reported that indeed the bill was a railroad over the northern boundary of the park, similar to the bill in the last Congress that never made it to a vote. Senator Conger could "hardly believe that the Senate would commit

⁶⁴ *Montana Pay Dirt*, 389.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

⁶⁶ Congress, Senate, 49th Congress, 1st Session, *Congressional Record* (March 9, 1886): 2205.

such an error as that.”⁶⁷ Conger, who had not supported the bill in the 48th Congress, seemed appalled that another similar bill would be working up for debate during the 49th Congress.

A Railroad from Billings?

For the first time, in its March 11 edition, *Forest and Stream* brought to the public’s attention the possibility that other routes into Cooke City existed. *Forest and Stream* included a map for the public to understand and to visualize the possible routes into Cooke City from Billings. The editors specifically called out three “practical routes from the mines to the Northern Pacific R.R.”⁶⁸ The three routes that *Forest and Stream* deemed candidates were the Clark’s Fork, Rocky Fork, and Stillwater river routes.⁶⁹ All three routes would leave the Northern Pacific near Billings, Montana, and travel west up the Yellowstone River. At the branch of the Rocky Fork River and Yellowstone River, two of the possible lines would have branched southward towards Cooke City. The remaining route would continue up the Yellowstone until it reached the Stillwater River, where it would then drop south and follow the river to the base of the Henderson Mountain. The Stillwater Route would be approximately fifty-six miles and “the average cost per mile should not be more than \$5000,” according to *Forest and Stream*.⁷⁰ The other two routes would have continued up the Rocky Fork River, and at the fork of the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “A Railroad to Cooke City,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, March 11, 1886, 7.

⁶⁹ *Forest and Stream* does not name these routes, but instead the names I have chosen relate to the river in which the proposed right of way would follow the majority of the way. The Clark’s Fork route is not to be confused with the name of the proposed railroad “Cinnibar and Clark’s Fork Railroad” which entered Cooke City from the south, and would not have traveled along the Clark’s Fork River at any point.

⁷⁰ “A Railroad to Cooke City,” *Forest and Stream*.

Clark's Fork River, the two routes would diverge. The proposed Clark's Fork route would continue up the Clark Fork River, wrapping around the base of the Beartooth Mountains until it reached Cooke City. The Rocky Fork route continued up the Rocky Fork River, until it reached the northern base of the Beartooth Mountains, never reaching Cooke City directly, but serving some of the mining claims located to the Northeast of Cooke City. The editors of *Forest and Stream* argued that the best and most practical of these three routes would be the Stillwater route. Although it "will be a vast undertaking. . . the Stillwater, however presents such striking advantages that there can be no doubt as to its desirability over all others."⁷¹ The editors also noted that the Clark's Fork route was in use by the U.S. Mail service as a wagon road to Red Lodge from Cooke City. Regardless of all the options presented to the readers of *Forest and Stream*, the editors made sure that all three remained wholly outside the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park.⁷² On that same day, the *Bozeman Avant Courier* reported the possibility of a railroad line up the Stillwater River as well, but the *Courier* included details that *Forest and Stream* did not cover. The *Avant Courier* reported that the Stillwater route had a ruling grade slightly greater than 100 feet per mile. This grade would equate to an

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Although *Forest and Stream* claimed that all three northern routes into Cooke City were better routes because they did not touch the boundaries of the national park, the routes chosen would have required massive engineering challenges to enable the railroad to pass through the Beartooth range. Although detailed surveys of the routes had not been published yet, the topography of the area would have required massive amounts of cuts and fills, trestles, tunnels, and horseshoe curves to enable a railroad to be constructed. All these engineering challenges would increase the initial cost of construction, and the cost of operations as well. Although a railroad was never constructed between Red Lodge and Cooke City, in 1936, a sixty eight mile highway was constructed. This highway features a grade much steeper than practical for a railroad, and the highway contains multiple switchbacks, and horseshoe curves. If that does not present enough of a challenge, the highway is closed from October to June each winter season. A railroad taking this route would have faced similar challenges and obstacles.

approximately 2.1% grade which would be the lowest of all three northern routes. This lesser grade would come at a cost of increasing the track mileage from Billings.

The *Pioneer Press* article, as quoted by the Bozeman newspaper, reported that a Northern Pacific engineer had examined the Stillwater line as well. Even though the *Courier* reported the news of the Stillwater route, the *Courier* claimed the *Pioneer Press* was “unfamiliar with the matter” and thus should not be trusted because it is “the most senseless kind of twaddle to those who have been over the two lines of travel.”⁷³ The *Avant Courier* continues its rampage against the opponents of the Cinnibar route. The newspaper editors write that the proposed line’s “only apparent utility outside of holding the world together is that it [the Cinnibar route] forms a natural highway to the Clark’s Fork mines.”⁷⁴

The *Avant Courier* editors continued to assure opponents that “the Cooke City road has no aspiration or anything in”⁷⁵ the direction of creating a monopoly within the national park. Seven days later, the newspaper attacks another Montana newspaper, *The Butte Inter-Mountain*. The editors of *Avant Courier* find fault in all of the routes reported by the *Butte Inter-Mountain* newspaper except for the line to Cinnibar. Instead of attacking the proposed routes, the newspaper takes a different method by attacking the location of the mines in relation to the outlet of the railroad terminal. The *Avant Courier* argued that the mining claims remained clustered around the community of Cooke City, along the southern side of the Beartooth Range, and a railroad attempting to reach the

⁷³ “National Park Railway,” *Bozeman Avant Courier*, March 11, 1886, 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

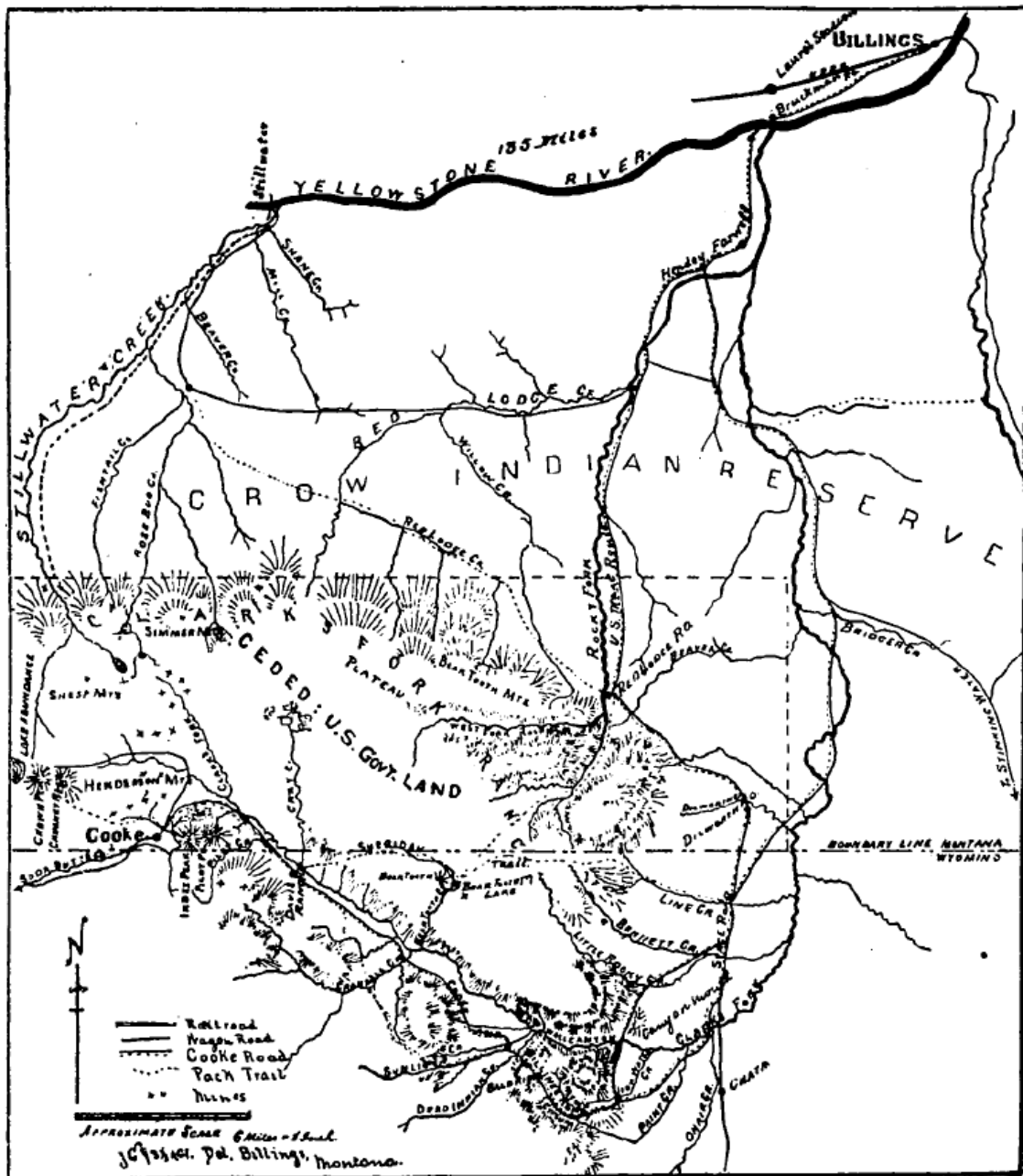
⁷⁵ Ibid.

mining claims would have either to circumvent the mountain range or tunnel through.⁷⁶

The clusters of the mining claims around Cooke City led the supporters of the railroad to believe that the only terminus of the railroad could be Cooke City.

Regardless of what the Bozeman and Livingston newspapers believe regarding the railroad, the charter granting a right of way had to first pass through Congress and make it into law. The railroad bill for the C. C. F. R. R. Co. was still working its way through the Senate and House Committees, while *Forest and Stream* continued the battle to prove that a railroad up the Yellowstone River and Soda Butte Creek to Cooke City would do untold damage to the National Park. Over the course of two consecutive weeks, the editors tried to drum up national public support for not building a railroad. *Forest and Stream* published article after article calling for the railroad schemers to withdraw their plans for the Cinnibar route. Meanwhile, Congressional opponents were attempting to establish a connection between the C. C. F. R. R. Co. and the Northern Pacific. Rumors of such connections had reached all the way from Washington, D.C., to Miles City, Montana, where W. F. Sanders, an attorney in Helena, had heard the reports. On March 17, Sanders wrote a personal letter to T. F. Oakes, the Vice President General Manager of the Northern Pacific helping to clarify the relationship between the Northern Pacific Railroad and the Rocky Fork and Cooke City Railway.

⁷⁶ Ibid. The Avant Courier editors point to the geography of the mining locations, and the geographical boundaries that separate the Stillwater River and the Soda Butte Creek.



RAILROAD ROUTES FROM BILLINGS TO COOKE CITY.

Figure 2 Alternate railroad routes to Cooke City. *Forest and Stream*.

Sanders noted that

While I was at Miles City recently I learned that Judge Conger (Congressman) and some other parties there were...circulating the report in Washington that Judge Pallard was a tool of the Northern Pacific R. Rd. Co...Of course there is no truth in the accusation, nothing had transpired in Judge Pallard's court, affecting the R. Rd. Company. Upon which to base a suspicion or rumor of that character.⁷⁷

On March 9, the Senate Committee on Railroads published its report, and *Forest and Stream* immediately began to try and sway the public's opinion on the railroad proposals. First, the editors published letters, such as one from W. Hallett Phillips, who under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, was ordered to investigate Yellowstone National Park. Phillip's letter called the railroad to Cooke City a "serious blow to the interests of the Park" because of the possible destruction of game, timber, and the public's ability to enjoy the pleasure of the Park.⁷⁸ *Forest and Stream* also noted discrepancies regarding the exact length of the line within the Park. The Committee on Railroads indicates that the total park length would only be "about twenty five miles," but the editors of *Forest and Stream* note the total length of the Park line as being "not very much short of sixty miles."⁷⁹ The article continued to attack the Committee on Railroads by calling the consideration of the committee a less informed decision, when "within easy reach of their committee room was Mr. Arnold Hague, whose long experience in the Park and familiarity with the Clark's Fork country and Cooke City should make his opinion

⁷⁷ 137.A.1.8 (F), General Manager's Records, Northern Pacific Railway Company records, Minnesota Historical Society.

⁷⁸ "A Railroad in the Park," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, March 25, 1886, 9.

⁷⁹ "Is there an African in the Woodpile?," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, March 25, 1886, 9.

weigh more than that of any number of less well-informed men.”⁸⁰ Throughout the month of April, while waiting for the Senate to announce the decision on the House changes to Senate bill 980, *Forest and Stream* continued its attacks. The proposed railroad would not only destroy the beauty of the Park, the editors argued, but would also secure the rights and privileges of the corporations to limit public access to the Park.⁸¹ A railroad company would “be able to take up desirable locations” within the Park.⁸²

After establishing that the corporate interests in the Park would be damaging to public access, *Forest and Stream* shifted gears and once again began to push for other possible routes into Cooke City. Again, the magazine published a map along with the article showing the Yellowstone River valley, and its proposed railroad line. The editors believed that not only did a gentler grade exist outside the Park boundaries, but that “each of them [the railroad routes] has been carefully gone over by a civil engineer...and each one of them is pronounced perfectly practicable.”⁸³ The map published, “shows the falsity of the statement made by the two committees of Congress that the proposed railway line... will only pass through the Park for twenty five miles.”⁸⁴

Some two weeks later, hopes apparently rose in *Forest and Stream* that a railroad would be built to Cooke City that would not enter into the boundaries of the National Park. *Forest and Stream* reported that “articles of incorporation for the Billings, Clark’s

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Railroads in the Park,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, April 1, 1886, 10. The editors of *Forest and Stream*, concerned that a private railroad organization would begin to limit, and monopolize the transportation within the Park, similar to manner in which the hotels, concessions, and other tourist amenities within the Park had experienced.

⁸² Ibid, 10.

⁸³ “Railroad Routes to Cooke,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, April 8, 1886, 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Fork and Cooke City Railroad (B. C. F. & C. C. R. R.) were recently filed” and it “has its engineer now in the field making surveys, and it is stated that the work will be pushed forward as rapidly as possible.”⁸⁵ B. C. F. & C. C. R. R. would route its line up the Clark’s Fork River to the mines at Cooke City, leaving open the possibility of another line up the Stillwater River to reach the mines surrounding Cooke City.⁸⁶ The editors of *Forest and Stream* praise the newly incorporated railroad as now the miners of Cooke City will receive their railroad without trespassing through the “people’s pleasure ground.”⁸⁷

On May 5, 1886, the report from the House of Representatives agreed with the Senate report that the C. C. F. R. R. Co. be granted a charter to build a road through the Park to Cooke City. The day after the Committee on Territories released its twenty-two-page report, the President of the Northern Pacific railroad also addressed the issue of a railroad to Cooke City internally to the Northern Pacific auditor general. In a quick hand written letter to J. A. Barker, Harris writes, “matters connected with Yellowstone Park will be determined by what takes place tomorrow.”⁸⁸ The letter from Harris suggested that the Northern Pacific was not only closely following the developments regarding the railroad issue, but also concerned about what the possible outcome would be in regards to

⁸⁵ “A Boom for Cooke City,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, April 22, 1886, 13.

⁸⁶ *An act granting to the Billings, Clark’s Fork and Cooke City Railroad Company the right of way through the Crow Indian Reservation*, 50th Congress, 1st Session, 1888. Congress would eventually pass a charter for the Billings, Clark’s Fork and Cooke City railroad to authorize construction in June of 1888.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *137.H.10.10(F) President Letter Press Book Vol 36, Feb 8, 1886-May 15, 1886*, President's records, Northern Pacific Railway Company records, Minnesota Historical Society.

the National Park. Indeed, President Harris and his successor T. F. Oakes would continue to follow the development of a railroad to Cooke City until 1891.⁸⁹

The Committee on Territories report used similar arguments and language to that of the debates regarding Senate Bill 1373 in 1885. The Committee on Territories report of 1886 developed further reasons that a right of way for the C. C. F. R. R. Co. was justifiable. The report from Senator Butler concluded, “that there is no practicable route to reach the Clark’s Fork mines except by way of the Yellowstone River, and the route proposed by this bill.”⁹⁰ Included within this report is the issue regarding the length of the railroad through the Park. If the United States Geological Survey map is used, then the length of the railroad within the Park would have been twenty-five miles, but if the Gallatin County map was correct, than the railroad would only travel ten miles through the park.⁹¹ Regardless of the map used, the Congressional Committee believes that the mines of Cooke City will prove to be productive enough to justify the expense, and construction of a railroad. “That these mines are of great value is beyond all question...Three smelters are in partial operation...”⁹²

Although three smelters were in partial operation in Cooke City, the minority views of the committee felt that a railroad was not justified through the Park, and the mines of Cooke City “as yet, small and undeveloped. It [the mining district] may have a brilliant future before it, but it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated.”⁹³ The

⁸⁹ Ibid., Volumes 36-52.

⁹⁰ Congress, Senate, *Report No. 936 and views of the Minority*, 49th Congress, 1st Session, H.R. 938, *Congressional Record*, (May 5, 1886): Report Number 938, 2.

⁹¹ Ibid. 1.

⁹² Ibid. 3.

⁹³ Ibid, 11.

consideration that the mines at Cooke City did not have enough mineral wealth was not the only reason that the minority view believed that the Cinnibar and Clark's Fork Railroad did not need a right of way. Instead the minority view reported that Cooke City is "only a small settlement, and inconveniently located for nearly all the recent mining developments of the district."⁹⁴

The numbers of mining claims located near Cooke City are relatively small, compared to the number of mining claims located to the north, clustered around Henderson Mountain. If a railroad terminal were to reach the northern base of the Beartooth Mountains, instead of Cooke City, a larger number of mining claims would be closer to the railroad terminal, and thus easier and cheaper to transport the mineral wealth. The minority on the Committee on Territories argued that a railroad line up the Stillwater River would be much more practical in terms of location in relationship to the mines, and "is about 125 miles nearer Saint Paul (Minnesota) than Cinnabar" and thus closer to the market for which the ores would be sold.⁹⁵

Throughout the spring and summer, the Senate repeatedly failed to call up Senate Bill 980 for a debate. Each time the Senators in support of the bill attempted to place it on the calendar, it was pushed aside. Throughout May, June, July, and August, *Forest and Stream* kept on the attack, to sway public opinion regarding the railroad bill, while the bill itself never reached the floor for debate. In the May 13 issue of *Forest and Stream*, full-length letters along side a report that claimed that the Northern Pacific was behind

⁹⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 11.

the land grab of Yellowstone National Park, was clearly designed to catch the attention of the readers. *Forest and Stream* writes

we have good reason to believe that the strength of this movement, for some time so mysterious, lies in the fact that the Northern Pacific Railway Company is backing the project. We are informed, on authority which we cannot but trust, that this is the case, that this grant will be utilized by the Northern Pacific people to run a line into the Park, so as to secure considerable additional passenger traffic, that there is no intention of building the road to Cooke, but that it is merely the wedge to enable this company to gain a foothold for a railway in the Park.⁹⁶

The letters the editors choose to publish in entirety were the same letters that minority views of the Committee had used to justify their statements. Letters from

Hon. L.Q.C. Lamar, Secretary of the Interior, Lieutenant-General Sheridan, Major J.W. Powell, Director of Geological Survey, W.H. Phillips, Esq. special agent for investigating Yellowstone Park, of the Interior Department, Prof. Arnold Hague, of the Geological Survey; Lieut. Dan. C. Kingman, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, and others having knowledge of these facts.⁹⁷

The journal also, provided evidence that a railroad through the Park would damage the health and beauty of the land. The editors claimed, “we have good reason to believe that the strength of this movement, for some time so mysterious, lies in the fact that the Northern Pacific Railway Company is backing the proposal.”⁹⁸

In fact, while the Northern Pacific Railroad was not publicly backing the C. C. F. R. R. Co., the Presidential correspondence records seem to indicate that the Northern Pacific retained interest in the development of the railroad as a possible source of revenue from the Cooke City Mines. In the following years between 1888-1890, the Northern

⁹⁶ “The Railroads and the Park,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, May 13, 1886, 16.

⁹⁷ “The Report on the Park Railroad: Views of the Minority,” *Forest and Stream; a Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, May 13, 1886, 16.

⁹⁸ “The Railroads and the Park,” *Forest and Stream*.

Pacific would become more involved, especially under President Harris's leadership. When Harris left the office of President, and T. F. Oakes took control in 1890, the Northern Pacific retained interest in building a railroad to Cooke City but did not actively seek a right of way.

A month later in June, *Forest and Stream* again backed their claim that the Northern Pacific was interested in a Park railroad. *Forest and Stream* wrote, "two roads are being surveyed to the Clark's Fork mines...but the surveys are not being conducted by the Northern Pacific R. R., though if the roads are built, it may be done by that corporation."⁹⁹ Three weeks later, *Forest and Stream* reported the rumors that "have been made to the effect that Mr. Vest and other Senators who opposed this bill were the tools of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company." This rumor was suggesting, according to *Forest and Stream* that the Northern Pacific was lobbying Senator Vest to continue to protect the interests of the Park. However, *Forest and Stream* compounded the issue by counter arguing that "if the Northern Pacific Railroad Company had any interest whatever in the matter it was that a road through the Park should be built, as it would form a branch of that road" and thus provide economic benefits to the Northern Pacific not only with freight traffic to the mines, but also increased passenger traffic into the Park.¹⁰⁰ While the editors claimed that the railroad proposal was a land grab to gain access to the Park, the railroad supporters claimed that it was simply a railroad into Cooke City.

⁹⁹ "Article 2 No Title," *Forest and Stream; a Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, June 3, 1886, 19.

¹⁰⁰ "The Park Railroad Job," *Forest and Stream; a Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, June 24, 1886, 22.

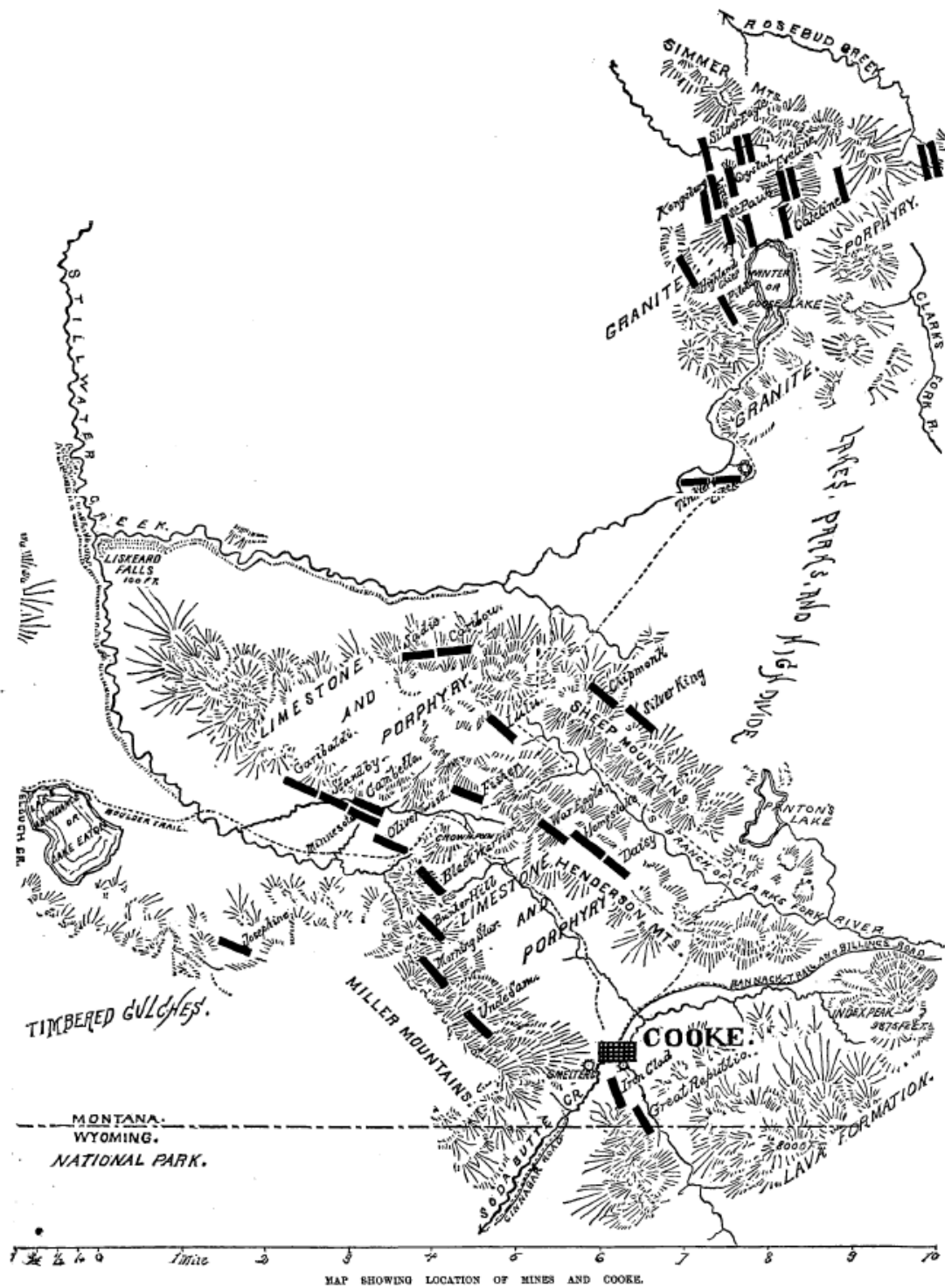


Figure 3 Mining claims located near Cooke City. *Forest and Stream*.

On June 21, 1886, the Senate finally took up the issue of the C. C. F. R. R. Co., but refused to place a vote regarding the issue on the calendar. Leading the charge once again, Senator Vest called the railroad through the park an agent that will “destroy the park.”¹⁰¹ Vest not only challenged the true purposes of the railroad, but also wondered if the mines at Cooke City were really worth the investment a railroad would require. Senator Vest was concerned that the mines of Cooke City were not of as valuable as the mining community believed them to be. For Vest, if the mines were indeed as rich as they seemed, then proof of the value would be in a private investment of a preliminary survey for a railroad route. And “yet with this enormous mining property... these gentlemen have not seen fit or proper to make a survey.”¹⁰² Vest further charged that, “this is a passenger road”¹⁰³ that was not intended to haul freight from the mines of Cooke City. Before Vest can finish his argument against the railroad, the Senator had to yield the floor for a message from the President of the Senate, and the railroad bill once again remained without a vote to be placed on the calendar for a full debate. In June and July, Senator McMillian and Senator Butler once again attempted to place Senate bill 980 on the calendar for a debate and vote. With each attempt on June 28th and July 2nd, the Senators failed to call up the bill for debate, and Senate bill 980 slowly began to fade away.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Congress, Senate, 49th Congress, 1st Session, *Congressional Record* (June 21, 1886): 5947.

¹⁰² Ibid, 5947. I have not found evidence to this date that any of the corporate interests building into Cooke City had done anything as detailed as a preliminary survey over the route in 1886. In 1890 Northern Pacific Engineer J.W. Kendrick would report on the preliminary surveys to President Oakes. Kendrick reported on the three different possibilities of building a road to Cooke City; the Stillwater Route, the Cinnibar to Cooke City route, and a branch starting from Red Lodge off the R. F. & C. C. R. R. See; 134.F.1. 3 (B), File K 65, President's records, Northern Pacific Railway Company records, Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 5947.

¹⁰⁴ Congress, Senate, 49th Congress, 1st Session, *Congressional Record* (June 28, 1886): 6208; Congress, Senate, 49th Congress, 1st Session, *Congressional Record* (July 2, 1886): 6440

Construction Of Line To Cooke Begins?

By fall and winter of 1886, Senate Bill 980 had faded only to be replaced by a new railroad proposal. This railroad was the Rocky Fork and Cooke City Railway Company (R. F. & C. C. R.), chartered to build from near Laurel, Montana, along the Rocky Fork River through the Crow Indian Reservation, with plans to reach Cooke City either via the Stillwater or Clark's Fork River.¹⁰⁵ While the R. F. & C. C. R. was working for its charter, the supporters of the C. C. F. R. R. Co. attempted approach number two: if Congress would not grant a right of way through the Park, then the boundary of the Park could be changed so that a right of way would be granted through public lands. *Forest and Stream* caught on to the railroad promoters plans, and called the bill to segregate the Park a move "that would benefit no one but the railroad gang."¹⁰⁶ However, by March the plans to remove a portion of land north of the Yellowstone River from the National Park and place it in back in the public domain had failed to gain Congressional support. In the final moments of the 49th Congress, House Representative Lewis Payson of Illinois attempted to insert an amendment to remove a portion of the park and grant a right of way to a railroad company, but Payson was defeated.¹⁰⁷

As if two railroads were not enough to reach Cooke City, however a third railroad attempted was now in the fight, and the supporters and railroad promoters felt that 1887

¹⁰⁵ 138.H.8.3 (B) *Rocky Fork and Cooke City Railway Company*, File 314, Comptroller's records, Northern Pacific Railway Company records, Minnesota Historical Society. The stipulation of the charter was that "no part of said line shall touch any portion of the Yellowstone National Park."

¹⁰⁶ "Can they hoodwink the house?," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, February 17, 1887, 4.

¹⁰⁷ "It has failed," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, March 3, 1887, 6.

was the year that a charter to build a line to Cooke City would finally be granted.¹⁰⁸ By spring of 1887, the newly proposed R. F. & C. C. R. looked to be the one railroad that would receive a charter from Congress. Finally, on March 4, 1887, the R. F. & C. C. R. was on its way to building a line for the relief of the miners at Cooke City after the successful passage of the bill that granted the railroad a right of way. The Northern Pacific President Robert Harris received a letter from J. L. Platt of the Fort Dodge Coal Company (and manager of the R. F. & C. C. R.) written on March 4 asking Harris about a possible contract with the miners of Cooke City to transport their products over the new road to the Northern Pacific connection at Laurel. Platt was convinced that the resources of Cooke City are such that is “equal to Butte, and as soon as railroad facilities can be had for it must develop.”¹⁰⁹ Platt continued “we have as yet made no survey from the coal mines to Cooke and only know of the nature of the route in a general way by passing over it.” The prospectus of the R. F. & C. C. R. was optimistic that the line to Cooke City “will begin this fall [1887] and [be] finished early in 1888.”¹¹⁰

As the R. F. & C. C. R. proceeded forth with the surveying and initial grading of the line, at least some connection between the Northern Pacific and R. F. & C. C. R. became clear. In August, the *Bozeman Avant Courier* reported, “H. C. Davis, assistant passenger agent of the Northern Pacific Railroad was elected president” of the R. F. & C. C. R.¹¹¹ Furthermore, in 1889 the R. F. & C. C. R. officially sold its charter to the Northern Pacific Railway Company, just as construction from Laurel to Red Lodge,

¹⁰⁸ “Rocky Fork and Cooke City Railway,” *Bozeman Avant Courier*, March 10, 1887, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Rocky Fork and Cooke City Railway Company, Minnesota Historical Society.

¹¹⁰ *A.H.876, James Hubbell Papers 1865-1906, Letters, accounts, legal papers*, Minnesota Historical Society.

¹¹¹ “Rocky Fork & Cooke City Railway,” *Bozeman Avant Courier*, August 18, 1887, 2.

Montana, was completed. Despite the line's name, the line stopped in the coalfields surrounding Red Lodge. The R. F. & C. C. R. never reached past Red Lodge Montana, and thus the miners of Cooke City were still without a railroad connection.

The Fight for a Railroad Renews

In 1890, another railroad company, the Montana Mineral Railway, filed for incorporation. Its charter claimed to promote a line from the terminal of the Northern Pacific at Cinnibar to the mines of Cooke City. Once again, some believed that the Northern Pacific was using the Montana Mineral Railway Company as a proxy company to gain access to the National Park. The *Bozeman Avant Courier* began to take issue with the R. F. & C. C. R. and the newly created Montana Mineral Railway in the spring of 1890. "If the proprietors of the Rocky Fork railroad seriously desire communication with Cooke, the people most deeply and directly interested would like to know why they don't go to work and build the road, instead of fighting every other reasonable proposition that comes to the surface?"¹¹² The *Avant Courier* editors, seeing that a charter for a right of way to Cooke City had been granted to the R. F. & C. C. R. in 1887, argued it was a pointless endeavor to continue to fight for the right to build a line through the National Park. The *Avant Courier* failed to recognize that the R. F. & C. C. R. had not reached past Red Lodge, and no surveys had been completed between Red Lodge and Cooke City. Regardless of how a railroad reached Cooke City, the miners would be happy, although

¹¹² "In Favor of a Railroad to Cooke City," *Bozeman Avant Courier*, May 1, 1890, 2.

the Bozeman daily paper pointed out that a line through Yellowstone from Cinnibar to Cooke City remained the cheapest and easiest to construct.¹¹³



Figure 4 Portion of Map from R. F. & C. C. R. Prospectus showing projected railway line to Cooke City. Montana Historical Society.

The editors of *Forest and Stream* meanwhile continued to publish articles fighting for the National Park and the prevention of any railroad through the Park. The railroad supporters attempt to circumvent building a road through the Park by again attempting to segregate the land north of the proposed route as outside the boundary of the Park. *Forest and Stream* argued this was the work of speculators whose interests were “not for the

¹¹³ Ibid.

good of Cooke City, but for their own pockets.”¹¹⁴ Once the speculators had won a right of way, “they can sell to the Northern Pacific R.R,” but *Forest and Stream* is not “certain that this corporation would buy such a franchise.”¹¹⁵ The Northern Pacific President, T. F. Oakes, in internal letters made it clear that the Montana Mineral Company was not involved with the Northern Pacific. President Oakes felt that the Mineral Company merely was attempting to gain a charter for a right of way, and would then immediately try to sell it to the Northern Pacific, similar to the assumption of the editors of *Forest and Stream*. By March, *Forest and Stream* began to feel confident that the bill changing the Park boundaries would be defeated, and the “miners of Cooke (will) be deprived for another two years of the legitimate fruits of their investments and laboring during the past decade.”¹¹⁶ *Forest and Stream* believed that the legislation would have passed to change the boundaries of the National Park and thus allow a railroad route to be built along the north side of the Yellowstone River, outside the boundaries of the park, than it would allowed a railroad to be built along the south side of Yellowstone River which would have remained within the park boundaries.

The True Value of the New World Mining District is Discovered

Somewhat belatedly to investigate the actual values of the mines at Cooke City, the Northern Pacific Railway under the leadership of T. F. Oakes contracted with mining engineer James E. Mills to investigate the claims. Prior to hearing the results of Mills’

¹¹⁴ “Scheming for a Railroad,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, February 20, 1890, 1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “The National Park Bill,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, March 20, 1890, 166.

investigation, Oakes wrote a letter to Yellowstone Park lobbyist, G. L. Henderson concerning the matters of Cooke City.¹¹⁷

In answer to your question of the 30th...how soon this company will build to Cooke City. I will say if the Cooke City camp proves to be what is claimed for it, a matter we are now investigating our purpose is to immediately construct a line up Soda Butte creek to the mines and I have not doubt we will build and have it in operating condition in twelve months.

In a letter to G. L. Henderson on August 25, Oakes writes regarding the status of the Montana Mineral Railway bill. Oakes reminded Henderson that the Northern Pacific would like to see the Montana Mineral bill defeated, and “would like to see a portion of the Park segregated.” President Oakes was against the charter to build within the Park, but felt that the segregation bill would provide an opportunity for a railroad line outside of the boundaries of the National Park. Oakes was not innocent in regards to the railroad politics, nor was he unaware of the power of public opinion against a railroad through the National Park.

Oakes believed that the true purpose of the Montana Mineral Company was not to build a road through the Park, but “to sell their charter to the Northern Pacific Company” and, “they will never build a mile of it.”¹¹⁸ Three days later Oakes wrote another letter to the lobbyist again clarifying that he prefers to see the segregation bill passed, and he urged Henderson to “keep in the background yourself and let nobody know that you take

¹¹⁷ G.L Henderson was a lobbyist for the Yellowstone Park Association, while his brother David Henderson was a member of the House representing the state of Iowa. For an in depth biography of G. L. Henderson and his lobbying efforts for Yellowstone National Park see chapter nine of: Lee Whittlesey, *Storytelling in Yellowstone* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press: 2007).

¹¹⁸ 136.J.11.2(F) *President Records, President Letter Press book Volume 26*, Northern Pacific Company Records, Minnesota Historical Society.

any interest in the matter.”¹¹⁹ Mills’ finds that not only are the mines of Cooke city overvalued, the evidence seemed to indicate that no rich veins remain undiscovered. Mills recommended that no railroad be built to Cooke City, and instead a “good wagon road from Mammoth Hot Springs towards Cooke City...would give the district access to the railroad at Cinnibar at a freight rate that would not limit any expenditures on mines or works with are warranted by the present promise of the ore deposits.”¹²⁰



Figure 5 Portion of Northern Pacific System Map 1890 showing the proposed line from Cinnabar to Cooke City. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 14.

With Mills report in hand, Oakes and the Northern Pacific realized that the mines of Cooke City were not nearly so promising as the mine owners claimed. After that, President Oakes silently dropped the matter of building a railroad to Cooke City. Likewise, the battle for a railroad in 1890 disappeared once again as Congress delayed passing any bills relating to the segregation of Yellowstone National Park.

After the Northern Pacific's interest in a Cooke City railroad ended in 1890, the number of proposals also began to slow down significantly. From 1891 to 1894, *Forest and Stream* continued to publish articles concerning the National Park and possible railroads into Cooke City, but at a considerably reduced rate as the railroad proposals through the park diminished. *Forest and Stream* continued to note occasionally that supporters of Cooke City were still attempting "to secure a railway outlet."¹²¹ December of 1892, *Forest and Stream* renewed the attack on yet another railroad proposed to Cooke City with an article entitled "A Standing Menace; Cooke City vs. the National Park." The editors wrote, "the case of Cooke City is clearly that of a few individuals against the general public, and the burden of proof rests upon her to show that her case is one of such extremity as to justify the sacrifice of the interests of the many to those who follow."¹²² *Forest and Stream* called the mines of Cooke City over speculated, and over valued, and points to the testimony of Oakes before the House Committee on the Park. "The Northern Pacific, the only railroad system anywhere near Cooke City, has steadily refused to build

¹²¹ "A New Forest Reserve," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting*, April 9, 1891, 12.

¹²² "A Standing Menace; Cooke City vs. The National Park," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting* (December 8, 1892), 1.

there, basing its refusal on purely business grounds.”¹²³ By 1894, proposals to build a railroad to Cooke City seemed permanently at an end.

Conclusion

The history of Cooke City was significantly shaped by the ten years of struggle to build a railroad line. The struggle to build a railroad brought the national spotlight on a tiny community in the Montana wilds. The mineral wealth of the New World Mining District remains buried underneath the surface to this day. Almost one hundred years after the railroad proposals to reach Cooke City died, a new proposal to extract the low-grade gold ore beneath the ground came forth in the late 1990's. The mining development proposed by the Crown Butte Mines, a subsidiary of Canadian mining giant Noranda, Inc would have developed a gold mine near Cooke City.¹²⁴ Under the leadership of President Clinton in 1996, a solution was announced that would preserve and protect Cooke City, and Yellowstone National Park. The Canadian mining company Noranda agreed to withdraw their proposals to develop the mines, and pledged to “create a \$22.5 million fund to clean up the mess that had been left behind by past mining operations” in exchange for \$65 million in federal lands and other assets.¹²⁵ The lack of railroad access in the 19th Century limited the growth of Cooke City, and the surrounding mining district,

¹²³ Ibid, 1. President Oakes is quoted in the article as saying “There is nothing in the Cooke City mines, and we did not want a railroad there... We had a report upon it by experts (referring to J. Mills report in 1890). The maximum value would not exceed twenty dollars to the ton, and most of it would not be over six dollars to the ton. If there had been one-tenth of the deposit and the ore had a value of fifty or sixty dollars a ton, we would have made an effort to get a railroad there, but there is nothing for a railroad.”

¹²⁴ For further study of the Cooke City mining proposal –see; Janis Johnston, *Contested Terrain* (M.A. Thesis, University of Wyoming 1998).

¹²⁵ “The Trust for Public Land,” Final Chapter of New World Controversy Complete, <http://www.tpl.org/news/press-releases/final-chapter-of-new-world-mine.html> (accessed March 15, 2013).

but Cooke City is not just another ghost town in Montana. While Cooke City may have not received a railroad, Cooke City was able to stake a claim on the tourist traffic visiting Yellowstone National Park.

However, regardless of when or if the mining claims are ever developed, they will still be plagued with the same constraints as in the 19th Century, a lack of easy transportation from the mines to the outside markets. The debate that took place from 1884 to 1894 was not only a debate about the railroads into Cooke City, but also a discussion of how to protect the new national park. Through colorful names—Rocky Fork and Cooke City Railroad, Cinnibar and Clark’s Fork Railroad Company, and Montana Mineral Railway—a vivid image of a railroad heading into to Cooke City was created. However, the process to build a railroad line into Cooke City was not an easy one, nor was the battle to prevent one from trespassing on the National Park. The identity of Cooke City directly tied to the struggle that took place during those ten years, Yellowstone National Park also developed its identity and role in preserving the wilderness thanks to the efforts of George Bird Grinnell, and *Forest and Stream*. While the mines of the New World Mining District lacked the depth, and richness that they were assumed to have, the railroad legacy of Cooke City remains in the form of an old wooden caboose tucked a block behind Main Street. The history of the railroad proposals captured with the image of a single caboose sitting on a single piece of track slowly rusting away, and with tracks leading nowhere, forever waiting for a railroad to come near.



Figure 6 Caboose in Cooke City. Photo courtesy of Linda Holland.

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