
REPORT
OF
IRAFISH, Agent
FOR CONSTRUCTING THE
AROOSTOOK ROAD,
DECEMBER, 15, 1838.

R E P O R T .

*To George W. Coffin, Land Agent of Massachusetts, and
Elijah L. Hamlin, Land Agent of Maine :*

The subscriber, appointed by you to superintend the construction of a part of the Aroostook road, having completed the work assigned him, would respectfully submit the following

R E P O R T .

About the tenth day of May last, we commenced work with a part of the men on the unfinished sections, and about the twentieth, the whole number of men for turnpiking and grubbing, were on the ground. Owing to the impossibility of procuring hay on the southern part of the road for the whole force, I commenced there with three crews only. The other four crews were located along the road in townships numbers three and four, where hay was plenty. One of the crews worked north, the other three south. I divided the road into sections, varying from one mile to one mile and three fourths each, making them as nearly equal as possible, in the amount of labor required for their construction.

One of the northerly crews finished their second section about the tenth of September. They were then removed to the northern part of the road, where they completed two short sections, to the thirty mile tree, about the thirteenth of October, having finished their work in a very acceptable manner.

I employed a man, with two horses and carts, with a crew varying from five to seven men, in carting gravel to cover the causeys and bridges, and in completing places where more

gravel was wanted than could be found on the spot. For this purpose I am satisfied these teams are superior to ox teams. They performed their work well until the fall rains commenced, which was about ten days before they quit. Several long causeys in exposed situations then remained to be covered; but as the recent heavy rains rendered the earth which was carted, soft, the wheels cutting through to the log work, that I found it would be very expensive finishing these places this season, and after covering them, so as to secure them from danger by frost, the ensuing winter, I discharged the teams about the twenty fourth of October. Should the road be continued, next year, and the same system pursued, the horse team and crew will have ample time to finish this work, before they would be wanted north of the thirty mile tree. The principal part of the labor which will be required on these causeys, will be in the vicinity of the Moluncas, on township number three, where the land is very low, and frequently overflowed by the freshets.

Excepting these causeys, thirty miles of the Aroostook road is now completed, to township number Five in the Sixth Range. The foremen of the several crews have fully answered my expectation, and each crew appeared not only anxious to complete their sections as soon as any other crew, but to finish them in a thorough and workmanlike manner. As we progressed northward, I found the ground more unfavorable than I had anticipated; hence the expenditures have somewhat exceeded my estimate. There are other reasons, however, why the expenses were greater than my estimate, some of which I will mention. When I made my Report last year, there was an abundance of bread-stuffs and provender for sale on the road; but it was so late in the season before an appropriation was made for continuing the construction of this road, that the holders of these supplies had sold them to the lumbermen. Hence, with the exception of what I was authorized to purchase during the winter, I was compelled to procure the bread-stuffs and provender from the towns of Lincoln, Lee

and Springfield, and transport them a distance of from twenty-five to seventy miles, and a part of the distance, over a road almost impassable.

It will be seen from my accounts, that the transportation of these supplies was a heavy item.

The unprecedented heavy rains which fell upon the road from the middle of May until the last of June, rendered it difficult to work at all, and impossible to prosecute the work with advantage. Although the road may have cost more than I had anticipated, I am satisfied, under all circumstances, no more has been expended this season, than a proper regard to economy in making the whole road, would warrant. From the middle of September to the middle of October, the weather was fine; no flies to trouble us; the men experienced; the teams in good condition; the work was prosecuted under peculiar favorable circumstance, and I am satisfied more work was done during the last month, for the same expense, than in any other part of the season.

I have constructed six new bridges during the season, varying from one hundred to two hundred feet in length, and repaired several others in a permanent manner.

The men being scattered over so large a portion of the road, my duties of superintending and directing the work have been extremely arduous; but I have endeavored to perform them to the best of my ability.

That part of the road from the thirty mile tree to the Aroostook river, has been repaired according to your directions. Jacob W. Stinchfield was employed to superintend this part of the work, and he commenced with a crew about the middle of August. He has levelled it, and made causeys and bridges, except across the Mattawamkeag, in such a manner as to make an excellent winter road. He finished his work about the twelfth of October, having completed it in a very economical and satisfactory manner.

I found the road made last season, where it had become settled,

generally, to be too flat for a road made of such earth, and I have, at a small expense, raised the road higher the present season, which I think has improved it very much.

I would observe, that in all places, where the land is cleared on one or both sides of the road, it soon becomes hard by use, while, in places where the land adjoining is not cleared, and the soil of the same quality, the ground remains comparatively soft, through the season. I would therefore suggest the propriety of felling trees, two rods in width, on each side of the road.

Should it be deemed advisable to complete the whole or any considerable part of the road next season, it will be of the utmost importance, that some person should be employed as early as practicable, to purchase a portion of the supplies, and have them deposited in proper situations. The hay in particular, should be transported before the snow becomes deep, to the places where the several crews will encamp. It should be taken a short distance from the road, far enough to prevent waste from passing teams, and then well stacked and thatched with straw.

I tried the experiment last year; it costs but little, and the hay is perfectly secure. The little that I stacked, notwithstanding the heavy rains and hot weather, was as good as hay taken directly from the barn. Screwed hay will not keep, unless it is secured from the wet. As soon as the weather becomes warm, after it has been wet, the hay will heat and spoil. It is very difficult to transport hay any considerable distance on this road in the early part of the season, as well on account of the heavy rains so frequent in this region, as the difficulty of hauling it, over roads, which are being made.

The other supplies could be stored with the settlers, upon the road, where they could be taken as they should be wanted. If no more supplies should be purchased, this winter, than would be required until the first of July, when the road would have become dry and hard, the remainder might be transported by wheeling, with a trifling additional expense.

Respecting the probable cost of the remaining part of the road, some portions appear very favorable for roading; but I am of opinion, however, that taking into consideration the additional expense of transportation, the cost of making the road per mile, will be about equal to the cost of that part already completed. In addition to this, a bridge will be required across the West branch of the Mattawamkeag, which will cost seven or eight hundred dollars, provided it is built in a permanent manner.

I have expended upon this road, the past season, the sum of twenty-five thousand six hundred twenty dollars and fifty cents, which with the amount expended last year, six thousand one hundred fifty-three dollars and sixty-two cents, makes the total expenditures for both years, thirty-one thousand seven hundred seventy-four dollars and twelve cents.

Deducting from this, twelve hundred dollars, the amount expended by Mr. Stinchfield, beyond the thirty mile tree, also, eleven hundred seventeen dollars and seventy-nine cents, being the amount of notes taken for the sale of oxen, and deposited in the Land Office of Maine, also the present value of tools and camping apparatus on hand, estimated at twelve hundred dollars, leaves the whole cost of turnpiking thirty miles of the road, twenty-eight thousand two hundred fifty-six dollars and thirty-two cents, being something over nine hundred dollars, per mile.

I herewith transmit my account and vouchers according to instructions.

I have the honor to be,

Most respectfully,

Your ob't serv't,

IRA FISH.

DECEMBER 15, 1838.