

Big Delta

State Historical Park



Walking Tour



Welcome to Big Delta State Historical Park. The park is a living-history homestead with roadhouse, garden, and animal and poultry pens. Big Delta was an important crossroads for early transportation, communication and supplies in interior Alaska. This area was also the site of a Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System station, and was used by the Alaska Road Commission for road maintenance and ferry operations.

This brochure and the interpretive signs on the grounds will take you on a self-guided tour through the park. Numbers in the text correspond to the numbered sites on the map. Tools, equipment and artifacts located on the grounds have labels offering further explanation.

If you do not wish to keep this guide as a reminder of your visit, please return it so that others can use it.

1 RIKA'S ROADHOUSE

The roadhouse is the focal point of Big Delta State Historical Park. The north-south section of this imposing log structure was built by John Hajdukovich who bought the site and trading post (#16) from Alonzo Maxey in 1909. Business increased as a trail from Valdez to Fairbanks was improved, and by 1913 the roadhouse was a center of activity for gold stampeders, local hunters, traders and freighters. Hajdukovich was a sourdough with many interests — prospector, trader, sawmill operator and hunting guide. He also served as U.S. Game Commissioner. With all his activities, he often let the roadhouse run itself. Many guests cooked their own meals and laid their bedrolls wherever there was room.

In 1917 Hajdukovich hired Swedish immigrant Rika Wallen to operate the roadhouse which prospered under her able management. In 1923 she bought it from Hajdukovich for "\$10.00 and other considerations," presumably in lieu of wages. The roadhouse was named "Rika's" following local custom. It was open year-round catering to travelers in the summer and trappers, miners and sawyers in the winter. Rika hired help in the summer to cook and work in the fields. There are no records of how many people were fed at Rika's, but in 1925 records show 2,149 passengers crossed the Tanana on the ferry. Rika operated the roadhouse through the 1940s, although in later years guests were by invitation only.

The roadhouse had eleven bedrooms, a meeting-living room, and a large kitchen-dining room. Rika added the east wing in 1926 and used it for her living quarters, storage and the Big Delta Post Office which she operated until 1947. Part of the original kerosene crate floor has been restored. The bedroom and kitchen are furnished in the style of the 1920s and 1930s. Furnishings were donated by local residents under the auspices of the Delta Historical Society. The little building west of the roadhouse, next to the outdoor public restroom, is a double-seater outhouse.

2 ALASKA ROAD COMMISSION SCALES

The Alaska Road Commission (ARC) completed and maintained the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail (later the Richardson Highway) and began ferry service in 1909 when it put a ferry cable across the Tanana River. In 1935 the ARC instigated a toll of \$9.25 per ton on all freight carried over the Richardson Highway to encourage use of the government's Alaska Railroad. The toll, which was collected here at the Tanana River crossing, caused a rebellion among truckers. The issue was resolved when World War II activity gave the Alaska Railroad more freight than it could handle and the toll was eliminated. Ferry operations ended in 1944 when the Army realigned the highway and built a steel bridge over the Tanana River.

3 FERRYMAN'S CABIN

This cabin was built for the ARC in 1929 by Louis Grimsmore, a ferryman, carpenter and sawyer, who worked for both Rika Wallen and John Hajdukovich. The ferryman's cabin is the only structure in the park used continuously through the years. It is now a residence for state park volunteers.

4 CONCRETE BLOCK STEPS

The only remains of Rika's pink frame house, built between 1950 and 1953, are the front steps. During the days of the road toll, disgruntled truck drivers built a warehouse on Rika's property to store goods while waiting to bootleg freight across the river at night. When the toll was rescinded, the building became hers. Rika moved it onto a concrete foundation, divided it into rooms, painted the outside pink, and moved in.

The house burned on Christmas Eve, 1965. Rika escaped the fire but had frostbitten fingers and toes from waiting in minus 40 F temperatures until neighbors saw the flames. After recovering, she moved into the ferryman's cabin where she lived until her death in 1969 at the age of 94.

5 GARDEN

Rika raised root vegetables, fast-growing leaf vegetables, flowers and herbs in the garden between the roadhouse and workshop and barn. Nearly everything served in the roadhouse was raised in the garden, adjoining fields and orchard. The strawberries in the garden today are from Rika's original plants which "went wild" in the surrounding woods.

6 BARN

Rika designed the barn like those in her Swedish homeland. The vents in the roof and walls circulate dry air in the winter and help keep the building cool in the summer. The log construction with willow and moss chinking was common in the 1920s.

7 MUSEUM

The Delta Historical Society maintains a museum in the sod-roofed cabin, a new building that resembles an original workshop which housed blacksmith tools, horse tack, dog harnesses and sleds. The artifacts in the museum, dating from 1900 to 1950, were collected from local people. Compare the historic photographs, taken by amateur photographers using early Brownie cameras, to structures in the park today. More historic photographs are displayed inside the roadhouse.

8 SPRING HOUSE

The spring house, originally located by the spring, has been relocated a few feet away. This small building kept Rika's eggs, cheese and butter cool. Several wells were dug in various locations and used through the years. The windmill by the garden, which is near one of the wells, is a reconstruction of the original built in 1932 by Carl Tveiten.

9 LIVESTOCK & POULTRY PENS

These new pens hold a sampling of animals that Rika raised. She kept sheep, goats, chickens, ducks, geese, rabbits, foxes, and honey bees, and oxen to work in the grain fields. Rika wove wool from her sheep, made butter and cheese from goat's milk, and raised chickens and ducks for eggs and meat. *A Travelogue*

of the *Richardson Highway*, printed in 1928, describes Rika's as "a commodious roadhouse boasting of such luxuries as fresh milk and domestic fowls."

10 GARAGE & MOTOR POOL BUILDING

The exterior of this new building resembles the Alaska Road Commission building that was originally located here, but became too deteriorated to repair. The ARC garage stored graders and road machinery during the winter and housed a maintenance shop in the summer. As the volume of traffic increased, beginning in 1913 when the first automobile and freight truck made the Valdez to Fairbanks trip, the road was worked on continuously.

11 STORAGE CABIN

This log cabin was built by the ARC in 1914 to store road building supplies and equipment. Note the skilled corner notches, still tight after 75 years.

12 MC CARTY STABLE SITE

The McCarty stable was located in the grassy area in front of the restaurant. The stable was in operation as part of the McCarty Telegraph Station (#14) by 1911, when horses were brought here. The Signal Corps station was named for Daniel McCarty who owned the trading post (#16) from 1905 to 1909.

13 RESTAURANT

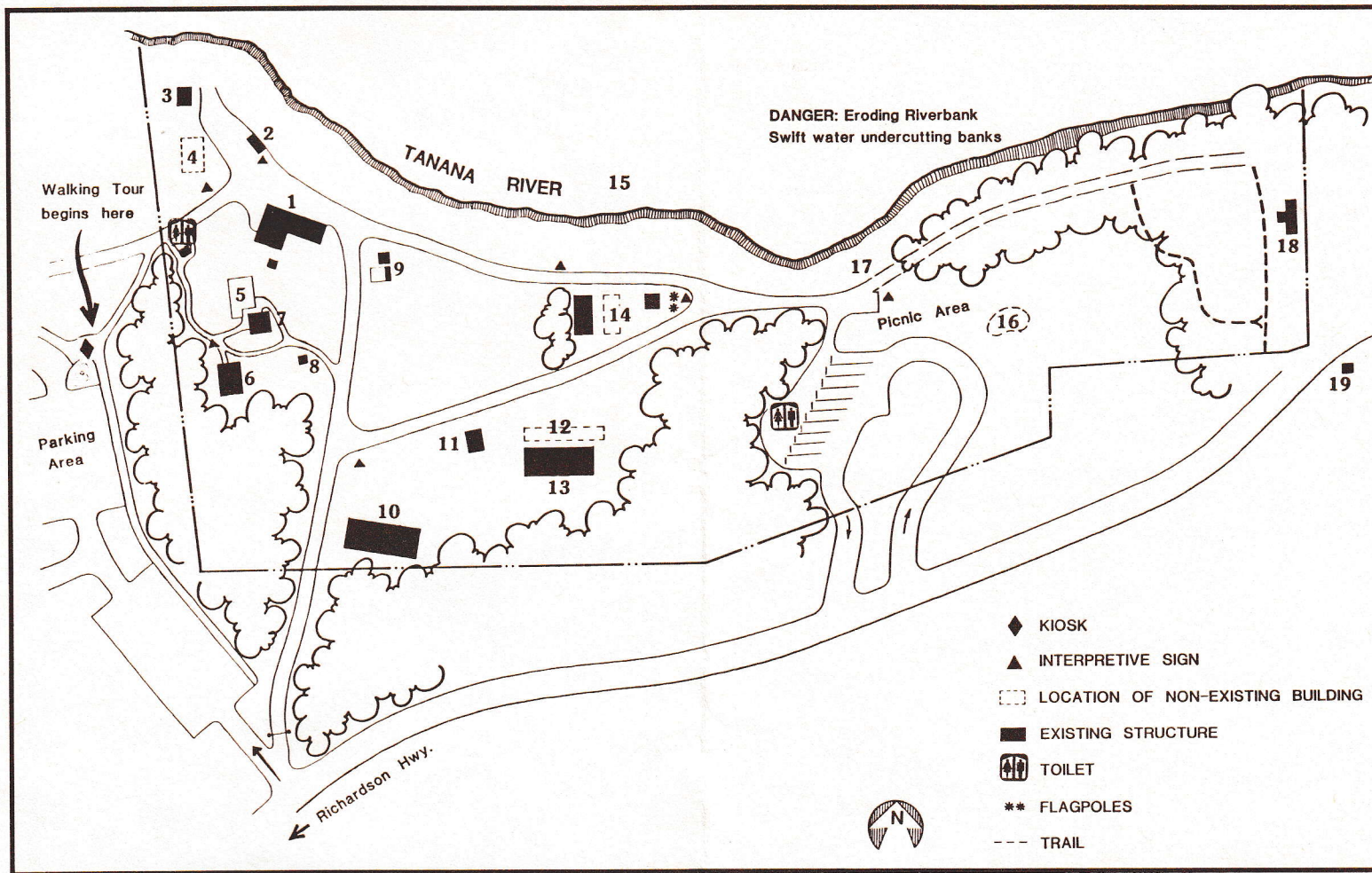
This new building is about the size of the McCarty stable. Inside the restaurant are artifacts and displays that illustrate the history of the Big Delta area.

14 MC CARTY TELEGRAPH STATION SITE

In 1900 it took a year to send a message from interior Alaska to Washington D.C. and receive an answer. To speed communications, the U.S. Signal Corps, a branch of the Army, built the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS). After part of the original line burned, the line was moved to parallel the new Valdez-Fairbanks Trail.

The McCarty station was established in 1907 to maintain the telegraph. Three log cabins housed the telegraph office, a dispatcher, two repairmen and their supplies. A year's supply of equipment and food for men and animals was brought in by dog sled during the winter when traveling was easier. This station was not as isolated as most because of the trading post, and later, the roadhouse. Note the original red and white Signal Corps colors on the log ends of the storehouse.

The telegraph was replaced in 1926 with a 50-watt radio, which was used until 1935 when the site was given to the Alaska Road Commission. During World War II, the Army reclaimed the property for a soldier encampment and at the war's end turned it over to the Bureau of Land Management. The State's Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation received title to the site in 1990.



15 TANANA RIVER

Beside you flows the silty Tanana, one of the longest rivers in Alaska. Springs along the banks keep this portion of the Tanana open even when temperatures dip to minus 45 F. Thousands of spawning chum salmon can be seen in the fall when the river drops and the springs fill the river with clear water. Just downstream, past the Alyeska Pipeline bridge and the highway bridge, the Delta River enters the Tanana.

16 TRADING POST SITE

Ben Bennett built a log cabin in 1904 which served as a trading post and roadhouse for prospectors going up the Tanana River. Sold to Dan McCarty in 1905, the area became known as McCarty's. John Hajdukovich bought the cabin in 1909. After building a new roadhouse, Hajdukovich used the old one to store horse tack and gear. No one remembers what happened to the trading post. It may have burned down or been dismantled to salvage the logs. At one time, Rika farmed the surrounding meadow, raising oats and grain.

According to old timers, bootleg whiskey was made in the old roadhouse during the 1920s Prohibition era. One story tells of a man who buried a five-gallon keg of whiskey in the meadow near the roadhouse to hide it from his friends, but ironically, he could never find it again himself. As he walked around at night probing the soil with a metal rod others realized what he was looking for and joined in the search. To this day the keg of whiskey has not been found.

17 PROSPECTORS' TRAIL

Walk in the footsteps of gold prospectors for about ¼ mile and think of the adventures of the hundreds who went before you following gold discoveries in interior Alaska. While the original trail continued to follow the river, you will turn south into the forest, pass the cold storage cache and then loop back through the trees. Please stay on the trail.

18 COLD CACHE

This large T-shaped underground cache (now collapsed) was a meat freezer. In mid-winter, blocks of ice were hauled up from the Tanana River and set along the inside walls. It was cribbed with logs, covered with horizontal poles and a sod roof. **Do not** leave the trail to investigate, as this structure is *very* unstable.

19 RIKA'S GRAVE

Across the road on a slight rise is Rika's grave, enclosed by a white picket fence. Please be careful when crossing or walking along the road as vehicles on this road often go fast.

Protect Big Delta State Historical Park

Litter is an eyesore and a disappointment to other park visitors. Put all refuse, including cigarette butts, in waste containers or remove it from the park.

Vandalism, such as damaging buildings and defacing or removing artifacts, is prohibited.

Vehicles of any kind are prohibited in the park, in order to maintain an historical atmosphere. Some exceptions can be made for handicapped visitors.

Wildflowers, trees, shrubs and ferns are found throughout the park. Enjoy them but please do not pick flowers or leaves, or peel bark from trees.

Pets must be on a leash at all times.

Discharge of firearms or fireworks is strictly prohibited.

Peddling is prohibited.

Permits are required for groups of more than 20 people. Call the Division of Parks in Delta Junction for more information.

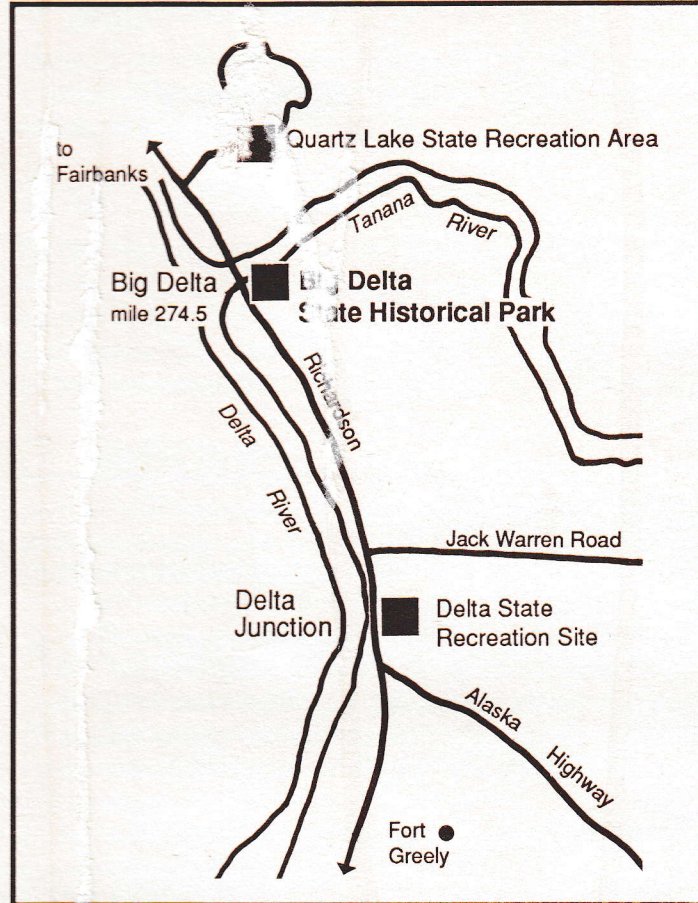
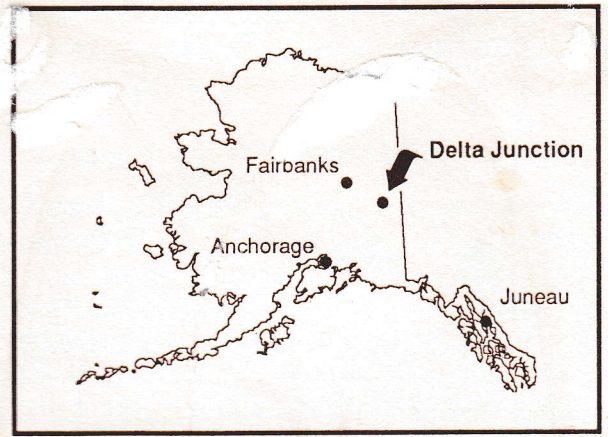
Smoking is not allowed inside any building in the park.

Please report vandalism or other violations to state park rangers at 895-4225, or to state troopers at 895-4344.

To report an emergency, call 911.



*Big Delta ferry and Rika's Roadhouse, circa 1910 - 1926.
(Photograph courtesy of Seattle Historic Society)*



Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation
3700 Airport Way
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-4613
451-2695

Delta Junction Ranger Station
Milepost 267.2
Richardson Highway
895-4225



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