

Albert A. Burleigh of Houlton, Leader in Building B & A Railroad

Conceived Financing plan; Knowledge of Territory Invaluable To Builders

By Richard W. Sprague

Albert A. Burleigh was born in a wilderness farm in Maine in 1841. He spent the years in the 50's doing the hard, physical work necessary to carve productive farmland out of a wilderness...

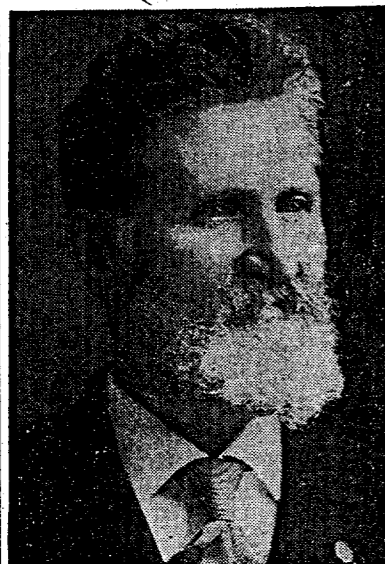
It took a Confederate Minnie ball in his thigh and a shell fragment in his shoulder to put him out of action at the engagement at Stanton River Bridge, Virginia, June 15, 1864. He was soon captured by Confederate forces and confined in a tobacco warehouse prison similar to the famous Libby prison.

SHAPED THE CHARACTER

These were some of the events and forces that shaped the character of Albert A. Burleigh... the experiences that made him a quiet man, but a man of integrity, vision and iron determination.

One Ezekiel Holmes, a Maine author and lecturer at Waterville College, spoke enthusiastically of the potential of the Aroostook Wilderness in 1839.

"Nothing is wanted," he observed, "but greater facilities for getting them to market to make their culture one of the most profitable branches of agricultural operation than can be pursued here."



Albert A. Burleigh

the collapse of the Northern Maine Railway company in the 80's and early 90's put the people in a frame of mind to support any railroad venture that appeared to have even a fair chance of success.

he conceived his idea of an Aroostook Railroad. It seems rather more likely that he was forced to lead the way because of his integrity and loyalty to the people he had served for so many years...

Once committed, however, he threw all his resources and energy toward the project. By November 27, application had been made for papers of incorporation to construct, maintain and operate a railroad in Penobscot and Aroostook counties.

EXCITEMENT RISES

The Pomona Grange of Caribou gave the promotion further impetus by its enthusiastic support and later secured support of the state Grange. Excitement rose to fever pitch during the first months of the new year as the Burleigh plan gathered momentum.

Before the legislature could give the builders permission to start, however, the people of Aroostook would have to signify their approval since the financing depended on a loan on the credit of the County.

On April 20, 1891, Aroostook went to the polls and settled the future of the new railroad venture with a lusty 'yea'. The majority was a resounding 4,696 or 5,201 yeas to 505 nays.

With the formalities disposed of the new company plunged ahead

failure and part of it was due to the Herculean nature of the project.

One need only to look at the faded photographs of the construction to admire the courage of the pioneer builders. Such earthmoving equipment as they had were shovels and strong backs and horse drawn carts.

LABOR SHORTAGE LESSENER

The labor shortage was lessened by the recruiting of hundreds of Italian laborers who brought with them their native foods and beverages... of which the latter elicited a promise from the management to law enforcement officials that none of the beverages would get into the hands of Northern Maine citizens.

The next spring, building started again in earnest and the wilderness rang with the shouts of teamsters and other sounds of many men toiling under almost unbelievable hardships of blackflies, and rugged forest terrain.

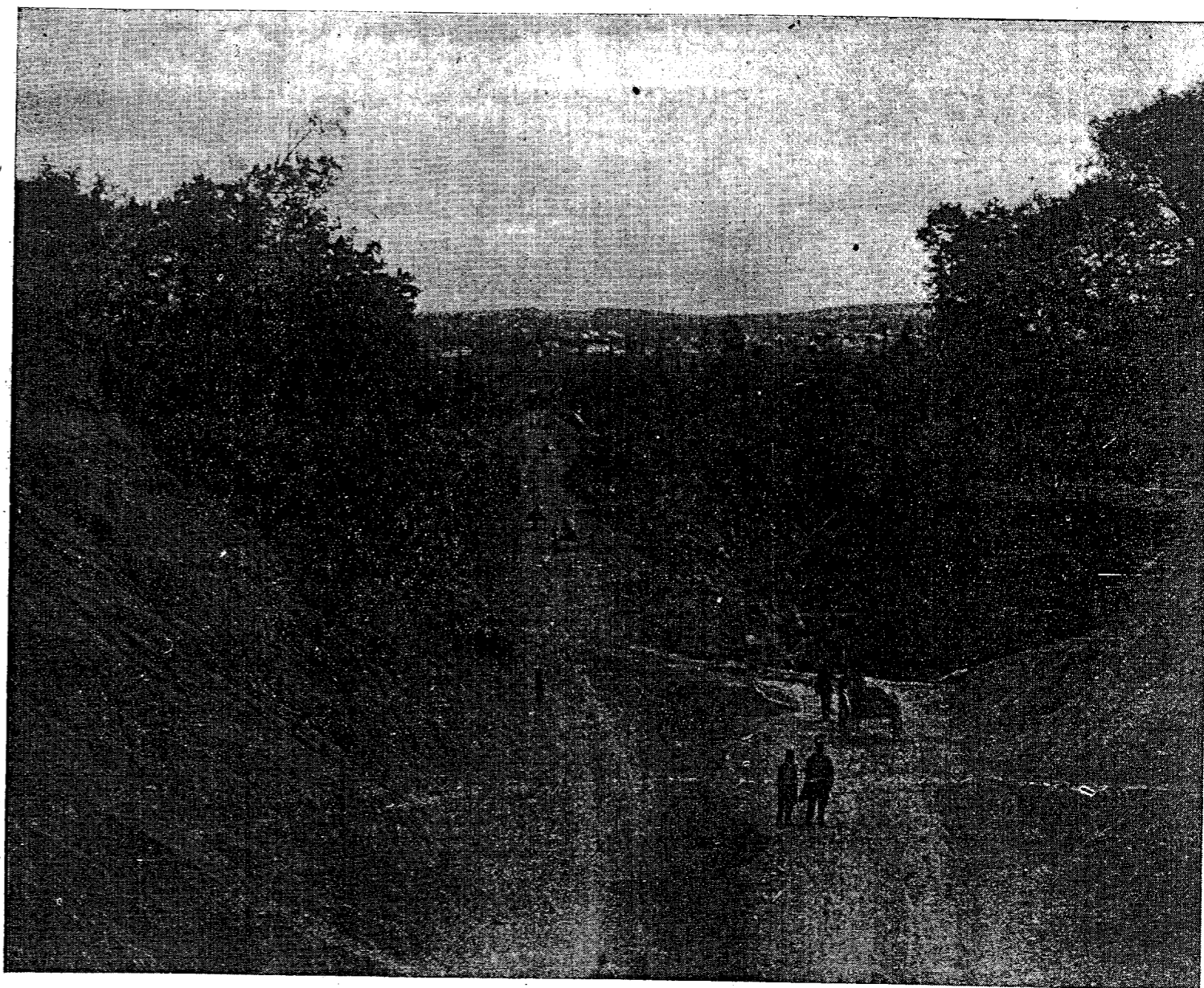
Joseph McLaughlin, Cedar Rapids, Ia., was one of the largest contractors on the line and had as many as 300 men working for him at one time and used from 70 to 80 horses in his work.

OFTEN WORKED AT NIGHT

The crews pushed on, often working men and teams at night to leave ties and fall so that crews would not have delays the following day. Winter set in, however, despite feverish efforts of construction crews to reach Houlton and the last 26 miles of track was literally laid on snow and ice.

Christmas Day of 1893 brought the people of Aroostook a gift that had been more than a half-century in the making and the event as

A Dream of Years Nears Realization



Builders of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad come in sight of their first major goal in the long northward march of the first steel rails into Aroostook County. In the far background can be seen the buildings of the town of Houlton as the workers cut through the horseback, west of town, prior to making their first crossing of the Meduxnekeag River.

were improved and gradually the pioneer railroaders learned to cope with machines and weather.

The coming of the Bangor and

railroad, nationally. One recent venture in the field of national public relations was a motion picture, "Assignment in Aroostook,"

The railroad's first board of di-

that does not include taxes and other contributions to the economy.

The railroad's first board of di-

The raising of potatoes has become an important industry in Aroostook county. During the year 1879 there were shipped from this

roostook soil. In the intervening years, the need for such a tal artery would echo noisily through the meeting halls of the w, new Aroostook towns.

The need for a railroad was apically demonstrated in the hoodless Aroostook War settled y the Webster-Ashburton treaty f 1843, and was to provide proponents of an Aroostook Railroad ith further ammunition in their usade . . . a project that, through e years, assumed proportions of e quest for the Grail.

Until the New Brunswick Railay Company (later the Canadian acific) built a branch line into oulton in 1871, the only overland ommunication Aroostook had, with he rest of Maine was the Military oad, opened in 1834 for conveyce of troop and military supplies, nd the Aroostook Road branching vestward at Molunkus, opened oon after 1834.

FIRST RAILROAD IN 1871

The military urgency of the Civil ar kindled a brief spark of hope or Aroostook when the European nd North American Railroad indiated plans for a road to Aroostook. The project died an obscure eath with the end of hostilities. Other railroad schemes appeared, blossomed for a time, and withered without leaving a single cross tie or length of rail in their wake.

The arrival of the New Brunswick Railway into Houlton in 1871, Presque Isle in 1881 and Caribou in 1876 provided an outlet to world markets for Aroostook's lush fields for the first time since the region was settled.

But it was a circuitous outlet, besides being expensive and inconvenient, and its arrival seemed, if anything, to strengthen the people's determination to have their own railroad. The increased production of potatoes in the two decades from 1870 to 1890, the difficulties of reloading cars at Woodstock and again at Bangor where the gauges of the roads changed, and freight rates, all added fuel to the fire of Aroostook railroad agitation.

Conditions were such in 1890 that the editor of the Aroostook Times estimated that the people of Aroostook paid the Canadian Pacific 1½ million dollars a year. He was also prompted to remark that such a sum would go a long way toward building a railroad into Aroostook.

FIRST VENTURE COLLAPSES

The disappointment following

cynical, but no less determined to have a railroad of their own than they had been 30 years earlier. It remained only for a strong man to rise and lead them.

Such was the situation one propitious day in October of 1890 when a Mr. F. Wiggin, a newspaper man from southern New England, paid a call to Albert A. Burleigh in Houlton. He still walked with a limp from the Minie ball taken on the field in Virginia, but there was steel in Albert Burleigh and the early years of hardship and danger had only drawn it to a fine temper . . . perhaps to fit him for the epic task he would conceive and execute. By the time Wiggin paid his call in 1890, Burleigh had become a man of affluence (his private fortune was estimated at \$1,000,000 that year) and a respected public servant. He had served as County Commissioner for several terms, and Collector of Customs for the Federal government.

PLAN IS REVEALED

And so it was almost inevitable that during the Wiggin-Burleigh interview, the two men would discuss railroads. Burleigh told the newspaperman of a plan he had been contemplating for some time. Wiggin left shortly afterward for Caribou where he met A. W. Hall, editor of the Aroostook Republican. Hall, on hearing of Albert Burleigh's conversation wrote an enthusiastic article. The fact that Albert Burleigh was a practical Civil Engineer made the plan that much more creditable in the public's eyes.

Public response to the article was immediate and spontaneous, and the former cavalryman was deluged with letters. Burleigh was, in his own words, "forced to take a position of carrying out" his own plan.

His idea, immediately dubbed the "Burleigh Scheme" was to finance construction of the road with \$500,000 loaned on the credit of Aroostook County (a sum that represented 5% of the valuation) and to issue mortgage bonds sufficient to complete and equip the road. The plan was later modified to allow private subscription of preferred stock at about 5 million dollars within and without the County.

FORCED TO LEAD

It is doubtful that Albert Burleigh entertained any notion of becoming personally involved when

the new company plunged ahead with the survey which had to be submitted to the railroad commissioners before actual construction could start. In June, the survey parties began hacking their way northward through the wilderness, much of which was virgin, at Brownville.

Moses Burpee, a man of wide experience in railroad construction, headed the party. Albert Burleigh made frequent visits as the route progressed and Chief Engineer Burpee later wrote that the first president's engineering experience and familiarity with the country was a great help in laying out the route to tap the richest forest sections and the greatest water potential.

SURVEYING PARTY ARRIVES

By August, the surveying party had reached Houlton and in November the engineers set up an office in the Almon H. Fogg hardware store in Houlton. The work on the survey was finished in February, 1892.

In the meantime, the directors of the railroad promised that construction would start when subscriptions of one million dollars in stock had been taken. By March, \$80,000 had been raised in Aroostook alone, with outside interests contributing enough to bring the total to \$720,000.

Before construction could start, the new railroad had to acquire the Bangor and Piscataquis from the city of Bangor in order to have its starting point at Brownville. The property was obtained with no difficulty, and the company tackled in earnest the troublesome business of raising money with both President Burleigh and General Manager Cram making periodic stumping tours of the state.

FIRST EARTH MOVED

By June 1, 1892, the new company was ready to start felling trees and moving earth, with one party starting at Houlton working West and one at Brownville working East. Whether or not the project would be successful, it was the first time any Aroostook railroad venture had actually moved earth and the people followed avidly the reports by the Aroostook Press of the work.

The goal was to reach Houlton by 1893, but the plans proved to be optimistic. A scarcity of labor (there were 150 men working on the Houlton end of the project in June when plans called for 1,000) was partly responsible for the

assumed proportions of a fourth of July celebration complete with cannon and salutes. One contemporary newspaper reported General Manager Cram at the throttle of the first locomotive over the new Bangor and Aroostook that reached Houlton that day.

There was a note of gloom on that joyous occasion, however, for when the railroad reached Houlton, the company was in financial difficulty and there was a real possibility that the contractor, C. P. Treat, of Chicago, might take over the road. It is a tribute to Albert Burleigh and the sort of man he was that he pledged his personal fortune and was joined by his father and brother — an amount of about two-and-one-half-million dollars) to finance the remaining construction north of Houlton.

MOVES NORTH OF HOULTON

Just a year after service was begun into Houlton, the road was open to traffic and travel to Presque Isle, Fort Fairfield and Caribou. The extensions were built in the years from 1896 to 1916, and with the main line, comprise the 602 miles of the Bangor and Aroostook essentially as it is today.

The effect of the railroad on the economy and culture of the County bore out the prediction a half-century before. As the railroad grew, so did the County and the "culture of potatoes" as Holmes prophesied, became one of the most profitable operations of the area. Between 1924 and 1927 Maine (which means mostly Aroostook) produced 25 percent as many potatoes as all seven major potato producing states combined as contrasted with the period between 1880 and 1884 when Maine produced only six percent of the total.

A more striking comparison is afforded by potato production figures of 1890, when 1,000,000 bushels were produced and 1929, when production was 44,877,000 bushels valued at \$50,252,000 or an amount five times more than the valuation of all estates in Aroostook County in 1890.

WEATHER CAUSED HARDSHIP

Building a railroad into such a rugged country brought with it problems that lasted after those posed by the initial construction. Aroostook winters proved to be not the least of those encountered by the pioneer railroad men. One snowfall recalled by veterans left drifts six and seven feet high that extended for as far as three-quarters of a mile. But locomotives

Aroostook and the construction of the Great Northern Paper Company's plant at Millinocket and East Millinocket also opened up new spheres in lumbering for Aroostook. Coupled with the opening of a route to the tidewater at Searsport put the new railroad, and Aroostook County, in a favorable competitive position with other areas.

Franklin Cram became president of the railroad after Albert Burleigh retired, a position he held until 1912 when he, too, retired. Cram was succeeded, for a short time, by Arthur Holland who resigned the position and was succeeded by Percy R. Todd. Todd held the position until his death in 1935. John H. Hammond was elected to fill the unexpired term of Todd's presidency and was succeeded in 1936 by Wingate Cram, son of F. W. Cram who held the position until 1948.

ONE OF SOUNDEST ROADS

Through the years, Albert Burleigh's pioneer railroad has grown into one of the soundest railroads in the nation and a vital link in Aroostook's economy. The dieselization program was started in 1947 and flowered under the administration of Curtis M. Hutchins, now Chairman of the Board.

By July of 1952 the road was 100 percent dieselized. It now has 48 diesel units which furnish dependable, economic year-round motive power to haul Aroostook's rich harvest to market. The Bangor and Aroostook, despite its relatively small size, boasts the second largest heater car fleet in the United States to insure potato shippers a ready supply of cars for the sometimes delicate process of marketing their crop. The large car fleet is leased for West Coast use at the peak of the citrus fruit traffic during the summer months, an arrangement which enables the Bangor and Aroostook to maintain such a fleet for the convenience of its Northern Maine patrons.

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

Other improvements during the administration of Hutchins, an able and energetic working president, include the now-famous Blue, White, and Red State of Maine Products cars that have advertised Aroostook County and the State wherever they have traveled from coast to coast, machine accounting, centralized train control, two-way radio, and a public relations and advertising program designed to promote Aroostook, as well as the

produced by the railroad, in cooperation with the Strategic Air Command, USAF, that has been seen by several million people throughout the country.

The effect of unprecedented competition from subsidized forms of transportation since World War II has served only to strengthen the railroad's determination to be the best railroad in the country and to give the best service possible to the people of Aroostook.

30 MILLION DOLLARS

To that end, the railroad has invested some 30 million dollars in new equipment during the last decade. New methods, new equipment have all helped improve efficiency, even in the face of drastically rising costs, but the telling factor behind the Bangor and Aroostook's determination to provide the best for Aroostook is that it is an Aroostook institution with roots in the rich soil of the County. Just how substantial a part of the economy it is may be indicated by payroll figures for 1956 when the railroad plowed back more than seven million dollars in wages into Northern Maine . . . a figure

directors under Albert Burleigh delighted the citizens of Aroostook with a resolution that "in the future any individual or collection of stockholders wishing to sell their holdings must first offer theirs to the company," to keep the management in the hands of people genuinely interested in the region. One has only to scan the list of the railroad's directors to verify continuance of the policy. Eight of the road's 15 directors are Aroostook men and the remainder are men sincerely interested in the region.

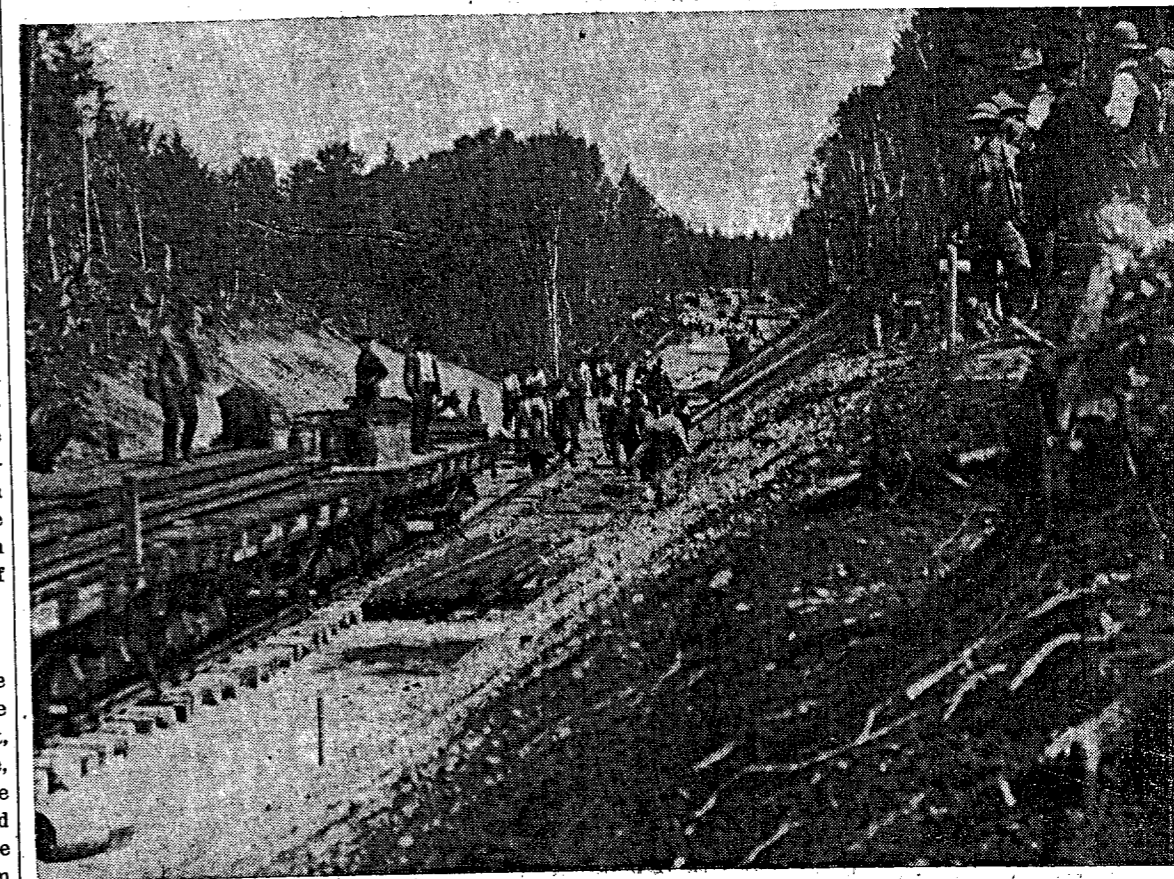
AROOSTOOK MAN PRESIDENT

As further proof that the railroad's roots are deep in the County's native soil, the directors elected an Aroostook man to the top executive position in June. W. Gordon Robertson, an Aroostook man with practical experience in the County's chief commodity, is the first Aroostook president since Albert Burleigh retired from the railroad he founded. And Robertson's administration promises to live up to the expectations built with Curtis Hutchins and the other dedicated men who have steered this sturdy railroad.

county over the B. & N. E. Railway about 450,000 bushels of potatoes and 4000 tons of starch.—Aroostook Times, Feb. 19, 1880.

It is estimated that the Maine ice crop this year (1880) will be sold for \$4,000,000.

Manager Osburn of the N. B. & C. Railway contemplates making some valuable improvements and changes on this road the coming season, which will be appreciated by the traveling public. Fifty miles of steel rails will be laid this side of McAdam, to Houlton and Woodstock. New locomotives and passenger cars are to be purchased and an exclusive passenger train is to be put on between here and Vanceboro, the running time to be made in two hours and a half between the two points. The road is to be put in first class order and fully equipped with rolling stock to accommodate the increasing passenger travel and freight business. — Aroostook Times, May 6, 1880.



The task of laying the tracks for the new Bangor and Aroostook Railroad was near to routine over terrain such as this but there were stretches when the right of way traversed rocky and hilly ground and across rivers and streams when the going was not so easy.