

CHAPTER 2

Historical Development

The settlement and development of south central British Columbia has been influenced by a wide range of activities. Fur trading, mining, extensive ranching, forestry and intensive horticulture have all left an imprint upon the face of this part of the Province.

The lucrative fur trade that had developed on the west coast of North America in the latter part of the eighteenth century resulted in extensive exploration of the coastal fringe, but the inland territory remained unexplored until Alexander Mackenzie's pioneer traverse of North America in 1793. The reports of Mackenzie's exploration started a spirited rivalry for control of the western fur trade by companies from eastern Canada, particularly the Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company. This resulted in extensive exploration of the interior of British Columbia by the intrepid explorers who are remembered in the names of some of our rivers and other geographical landmarks. Following the Okanagan River on a fur trading mission up the Columbia River, David Stuart is believed to be the first white man to make its discovery.

In the early 1820's the Okanagan became a major trading route into the interior forts of what was then known as New Caledonia. Trading goods were brought by ship from England to Astoria, and later to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. These goods were loaded into long canoes and paddled up the Columbia River to Fort Okanagan at its junction with the Okanagan. The load was then shifted to mule trains and transported over the fur-brigade trail along the west of Okanagan Lake to a point near its northern end and thence to Fort Kamloops for distribution beyond that point. Furs were returned over the same route. However, permanent settlement along the Okanagan Valley was discouraged by the fur companies.

The beginning of the 1850's saw a significant influx of population. Gold was discovered in the Lower Fraser River in 1857 and as news of this spread, thousands of men crossed from the United States and journeyed through the Okanagan to gold fields near Yale, Boston Bar, Lilloet and later to the Caribou or the Similkameen Valley.

For the first time, the population of homesteaders and settlers became large enough to support agricultural development. Between 1861 and 1864, an estimated 14,000 head of cattle, horses and sheep were imported to the Okanagan from Oregon. Wheat and other grains were grown on moister soils in the valley bottoms and stock were grazed on the hillsides. Beef cattle were regularly driven from the Okanagan over the Dewdney Trail to Hope, and horses were supplied for transportation to the gold fields.

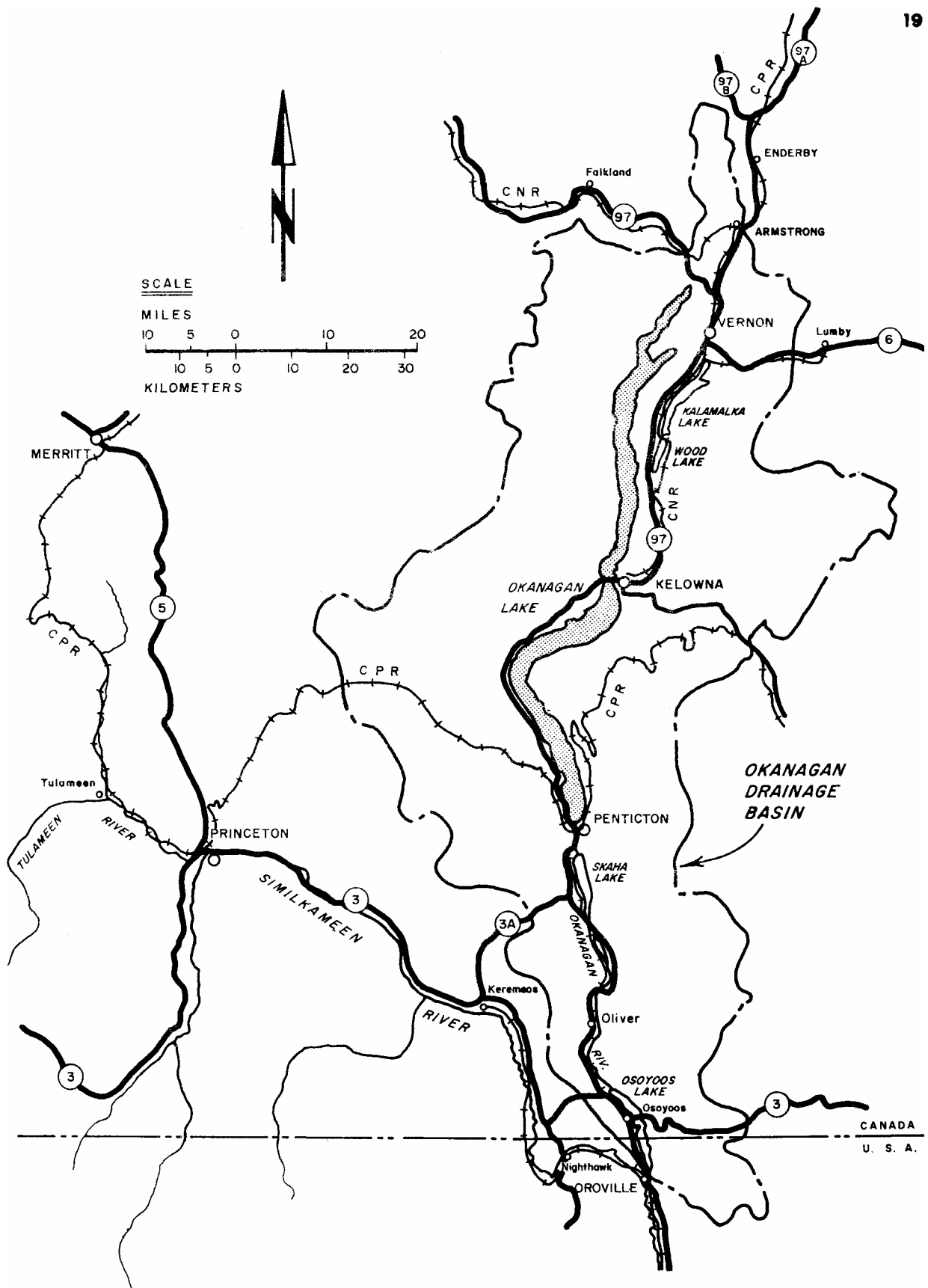
The gold-rush was waning by the 1880's but a small permanent population had been established. In 1876, a road was completed between Kamloops and the Oblate Father's mission near the present city of Kelowna. During the 1880's the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway marked the beginning of the final stabilization of the Okanagan. Regular steamer service was inaugurated on Okanagan Lake in 1886 and the Shuswap and Okanagan Railway was completed from Sicamous to Okanagan Landing in 1892. These lake steamers continued to ply the lakes until 1935 when improved highways in the valley made the service no longer practical.

The period from 1860 to 1920 marked a period of great mining activity in areas immediately surrounding the Okanagan Valley in the Similkameen, Kettle and Granby basins. Flourishing copper and gold mines sprung up at such places as Phoenix, Deadwood and Boundary Camp. Osoyoos became an important supply center for this industry.

An expanding transportation network in the Okanagan Valley was coupled with an important agricultural advance. The large Coldstream Ranch near Vernon and the Guisachan Ranch at Kelowna began to grow apples as a commercial crop in 1892. A land boom resulted with subdivision of large holdings for orchard development. Irrigation companies were formed; storage and packing plants were constructed. Centers such as Penticton, Kelowna and Vernon became firmly established. In addition to apples, it was found the hot, dry soils of the southern part of the valley were suitable for soft fruits such as apricots and peaches. Land that sold for \$1.00 per acre in 1898 commanded a price of \$1,000 per acre in 1910.

Rapid overproduction and in many cases, poor land management brought about a collapse of the boom in the early years of World War I. However, after the war -in the 1920's, final stabilization began. A highly integrated cooperative system was established for fruit marketing. The valley bottom between Vernon and Shuswap Lake developed into an important dairy area. Livestock ranching for cattle and sheep remained an important part of the economy. After World War II, the forest industries became the most important element in the economy. Mills were developed in nearly every settlement and a wide variety of wood products were produced. In 1957, a plywood factory was established in Kelowna.

The economic development paralleled expansion of transportation facilities, In 1949 a highway link was completed through difficult mountain terrain from Princeton to Hope. Complete modernization of the highway through the Okanagan Valley and from Osoyoos through the Kettle Valley to Grand Forks has made the Okanagan one of the most readily and easily accessible parts of the Province (Figure 2.1). With the development of this transportation system, the Okanagan Basin entered a new era of economic growth.



TRANSPORTATION ROUTES

Figure 2.1

PART II

EXISTING RESOURCE BASE