what's ahead for ALASKA?

Picture-postcard scene of Alaska's famed Matanuska Valley is beautiful but hardly typical. Less than 1 percent of land is farmable; rest is wilderness.

New state's biggest dilemma is transportation—or lack of it. Scarcity of highways and railroads makes boat and airplane only links to outside for many isolated areas of sprawling state. Bush pilots are Alaska's truck drivers.

The cover photograph and the dramatic pictures on these pages were taken exclusively for Family Weekly by Ozzie Sweet, who traveled more than 9,000 miles to capture on film the people, the industry, and the scenic splendor of our 49th state. During his often-rugged trip, photographer Sweet grew the handsome beard shown in the accompanying picture.

Here is a look at this vast land, its rich resources, its current problems, and its limitless future as it becomes our 49th state.

by Kevin V. Brown

"IN AUGUST, 1900, Nome consisted of two filthy streets without a sewer or ditch. Aimless, restless crowds milled through them; drunkenness and gambling were everywhere, with murder an almost daily occurrence. Men were shot down in the center of town and no arrests were made.

"For three miles along the beach there were tents, 20 deep, and gold seekers were still arriving at the rate of almost a thousand a day. There was no shelter for them. Women and children were sleeping uncovered on the wet sands. Thousands of tons of every conceivable kind of freight lay in inextricable heaps on the beaches, unprotected from tide and theft. Smallpox was spreading, and typhoid and pneumonia were already beyond human control."

This sordid scene was described by Merle Colby in his book "Last American Frontier." Last July the Associated Press described another stirring street scene:

"Bells rang, men roared, and automobile horns hooted. People cheered and shouted to friends and neighbors. Fire trucks rushed through the downtown district, sirens screaming. Rivers turned gold, as wildly happy residents poured dye into the streams. Drinks were on the house at all bars, and spontaneous parades sprung up everywhere. Housewives marched through town wearing embroidered badges that proclaimed:

"'Bigger than Texas, better than California. Alaska—God's country.'"

Some 58 years separated the Alaskan gold rush and statehood. A few things changed in the interim—and a few didn't. Men still seek gold—and some still drink and gamble—but law has come to the land of the midnight sun. While Alaskans today are not immune to disease, they now have more than 25 hospitals to care for their bodies, and many more schools and churches to care for their minds and souls. They no longer sleep on beaches, but adequate housing is by no means abundant. Occasional aimless, restless crowds still gather, because often there is no work. But the crowds that marched when statehood came marched with joy, even though some were marching on unpaved streets—their eyes on the future, their feet in the past.

In the flood of publicity that followed Alaska's entry into the Union—the contrasts between the old and the new, the big land and the small population—one contrast was almost overlooked. Alaska is a land of hope, but it also has its share of despair.

The average age of Alaskans is 26, five years younger than that in the other 48 states, and its birth rate is about one-third higher. But the contrast is frightening. Alaska has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. The "last American frontier" is, for some, a dead end.

As one observer commented after Alaskans themselves approved statehood by an overwhelming majority of more than 5 to 1, "The five who voted for it didn't eliminate the reasons the one had for voting against it."

Fabulously big, fabulously rich, fabulously beautiful, with a fabulous future before it, Alaska is indeed God's country. But the devil still has his eye on it.

What's ahead for Alaska? Can the 49th state surmount some of its seemingly insurmountable obstacles?

Its biggest obstacle is the very fact of its bigness. Anyone who's followed the statehood story should know by now that Alaska is one-fifth the size of the other 48 states. The comparison has been repeatedly demonstrated by superimposing an Alaskan map over one of the United States.

BUT LOOK at this double-exposure more closely. Alaska's southeastern boundary (on the Panhandle near Ketchikan) falls alongside Charleston, S. C. Anchorage is near St. Louis, and Point Barrow on the Canadian border north of Minneapolis. The Aleutians sweep South and West past El Paso, on the Mexican border, Tucson, and Los Angeles, with Attu, the end of the chain, coming to rest near San Francisco.

Coast to coast, border to border, and it's all one state.

The size becomes more staggering with this statistic: Alaska has fewer than 1,000 miles of paved roads—less than in Brooklyn, N. Y.—traversing its nearly 600,000 square miles of forests, glaciers, mountains, and trackless tundra. It has only one overland link to the United States—the World War II-built Alaskan highway, 2,350 miles of gravel road through long, uninhabited sections of a friendly, but foreign country. In Winter, it's often impassable.

Within Alaska the roads are concentrated almost entirely around and between Anchorage and Fairbanks, the northern terminal of the Alaskan highway. Almost all the small towns and a few big ones—Nome, Sitka, Ketchikan, and even Juneau, the capital—are reachable only by sea or by air. This is probably the most striking contrast of all—the chief means of transportation in Alaska are the oldest and newest, the boat and the plane, unless you count the dog sled.

There is only one railroad, less than 500 miles long, from Seward, a seaport, via Anchorage to Fairbanks in the interior. It's operated by the Federal Government and has been an open sore among Alaskans for years. They claim the railroad has been operated solely for profit, unfairly and ruthlessly, and should have been used instead to develop the territory, regardless of cost. One charge is that it raises its rates in Winter, when highways are closed to trucking, and lowers them in Spring below normally profitable trucking rates.

The railroad freely admits the charge. One official explains that the Government lost about \$44 million dollars operating the road from 1914, when it opened, to 1954, when it was ordered by Congress "to operate within the revenues"—i.e., make a profit. Since 1954, it's made a profit—nearly a million a year, and truckers are feeling the pinch.

In any case, next to a network of highways connecting the major cities (there's one under construction between Nome and Fairbanks), Alaskans hope to build more railroads, notably one connecting them with the other 48 states. Better shipping facilities are also in view. Anchorage has launched an \$8.2 million port development program which, it hopes, will make it the No. 1 port in Alaska. Seward, 114 miles south, now holds that position.

Transportation is unquestionably Alaska's No. 1 headache, and one that must be soothed before any of its other problems can begin to be solved. It's a chicken-and-egg problem. Business and industry claim they cannot expand until they get better and cheaper transportation, and transportation services claim they cannot improve until business and industry expand enough to make it worthwhile.

Under statehood, perhaps neither chicken nor egg will come first, but both together. The new state government, in addition to plans for improving its transportation, is offering inducements to new industries—exemptions from state taxes, for instance—to help broaden the state's economy. It will have to, because one of the hardest facts of Alaskan life is that almost everything comes into Alaska, almost nothing goes out. It's this lack of a "haul back" load that has helped keep the price of transportation so high. Once Alaska starts exporting in volume, Alaskans say, the cost will come down.

AH, BUT there's the rub. Export what? The obvious answer would be the same things it's been exporting for years—its natural resources, its fish, its almost untapped lode of minerals, and its prolific, untouched forests. But these things have been available for years and the unhappy truth is that their exports have been dwindling.

Take fishing. Long Alaska's leading industry, it has gone downstream in recent years. The salmon catch alone has dropped from eight million cases a year ago to two million. Alaskans claim it's because of unrestricted trapping by private fishermen, who catch the salmon before they can get upstream to spawn. Under statehood, they hope to impose some workable restrictions to build up the stock once more.

Take mining. All that glitters in Alaska may very well be gold, because there's still plenty of it up there. But, in one of the most ironic twists in economic history, there's no longer any profit in it. The old sourdough who panned for gold along streams is almost extinct; he can't compete with the big mining companies, who have bigger and better equipment. But even these giants are in trouble.

The biggest, the United States Smelting, Mining, and Refining Co., has shut down a number of its mines and expects to completely suspend operations within four years. The gold is still there—seemingly inexhaustible—but it's too hard to get out because of the perpetually frozen subsoil and, while the price of gold has remained stable, labor and equipment costs have increased several times over.

Other metals, whose prices aren't fixed, aren't much more accessible. Only 2 percent of Alaska has been surveyed, but 31 of the 33 strategic minerals have been found there. Oil has also been discovered, and a gas field north of Fairbanks is awaiting exploitation. To all of which, one might ask, "So what?" It's still going to cost too much to get the minerals out of the ground and out of Alaska to make it pay off for quite some time.

Now take lumber. Here even the critics admit that Alaska's potential is phenomenal, that its vast timber riches can't even be estimated accurately. To exploit some of this virgin forest, the first pulp mill was built at Ketchikan four years ago. Another \$5-million mill is under way at Sitka, and two more are planned in the Panhandle. Sound promising?

"No," said an official of the Ketchikan mill. "Right now we aren't producing our full capacity, because we can't even sell the little we do produce." The cause? Those old bugaboos, labor, equipment, and transportation costs.

ALASKANS have answers to all of this: bring down the costs and find closer markets. Japan, for instance, is being eyed covetously as a potential customer. But, when pressed, Alaskans admit that even this won't be enough. The real answer is not only to develop its own resources but to create a greater variety of business and industry. For the enterprising man with money, the opportunities to start a new business are almost limitless.

Needed most desperately are the service facilities—stores, restaurants, hotels, repair shops, and filling stations—and factories producing consumer goods from natural resources, such as furniture and building materials. Hydroelectric power is another potent possibility. More than 200 sites have been located with an estimated capacity of well over eight million kilowatts, one-tenth the present capacity in the United States. Alaska believes that, as a state, it will be much more attractive to new investments along these lines than it ever was in the unpredictable atmosphere of Federal control. The new home-rule government is dedicated to economic growth.

But it will take plenty of capital to →