



Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site

Commemorating the mass movement of people to the Yukon during the Klondike Gold Rush.

Background

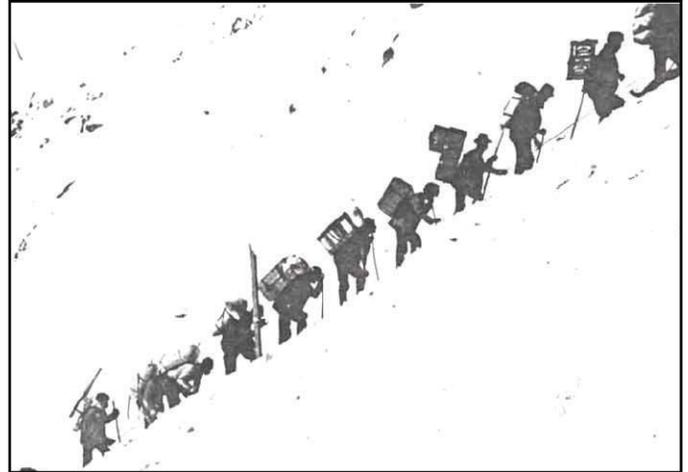
Before Europeans and American traders arrived in this area, the Chilkoot Trail served as a trade and travel route to the interior for the coastal Tlingit and interior Athapaskan First Nations for centuries. Aboriginal control of the trail by the Chilkoot Tlingit remained strong through the nineteenth century.

By the 1880s the First Nations allowed prospectors and exploration groups to use the Chilkoot route; however, the dramatic increase in the number of prospectors going into the Yukon during the 1890s soon eroded Tlingit control.

As a traditional Aboriginal trade and travel route, the trail remains an important part of First Nations' history, but it was the Klondike Gold Rush of 1896–1899 that transformed the Chilkoot Trail into legend. Although many routes to the gold fields were available to the Stampeders, the Chilkoot Trail provided the shortest and cheapest way to the Klondike.



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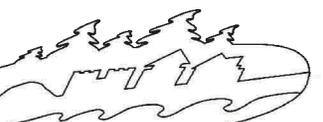
Stampeders packing up the Golden Stairs during the Gold Rush. *MacBride Museum of Yukon History (#3626)*

Known as the poor man's route to the Klondike, it permitted an individual to transport their supplies over the trail by their own labour. Movement over the Chilkoot Trail peaked during the winter of 1897–98. After the completion of the railroad through the White Pass in 1899, the Chilkoot Trail was virtually abandoned as a route to the Klondike.

Today, the Chilkoot Trail is a 53 km / 33 mile hike through history; it is one of North America's most fabled treks.

Reasons for National Historic Importance

The Chilkoot Trail was designated a national historic site because of the role it played in the mass movement of people to the Yukon during the Klondike Gold Rush. It protects the historic gateway to the Yukon once trod by Tlingit First Nation traders and Klondike gold rush prospectors. The Chilkoot Trail is a component of the Klondike Gold Rush International Historical Park, which includes sites from Seattle to Dawson City.



Milestones

1896

August 16. Gold is discovered in the Klondike by Keish (Skookum Jim) and his companions.

1897

July 15. The steamship *Excelsior* arrives in San Francisco with 750,000 dollars worth of gold; two days later the *Portland* arrives in Seattle with two tons of gold. Stories of the Klondike Gold Rush inflame the world.

1897

Summer and autumn. The first stampeders arrive in Dyea and Skagway; some travel over the passes and directly down the Yukon River to Dawson City. The Klondike Gold Rush begins.

1897-1898

Winter. The Chilkoot Trail and the White Pass Trail are flooded with a seemingly endless tide of stampeders scrambling towards the Klondike.

1898

May. Spring break up on Lake Lindeman and Bennett Lake. Over 7,000 boats begin the water journey to Dawson City and the Klondike.

1898

Spring and summer. The population of the Yukon peaks at over 30,000. Dawson City becomes the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg.

1899

July. The White Pass Yukon Route Railway is completed from Skagway to Bennett. The Chilkoot Trail is bypassed. A year later the train reaches Whitehorse, and Bennett City is abandoned.

1899

Summer. On the beaches in Nome, Alaska, gold is discovered and a new rush begins. The Klondike Gold Rush is over.

1993

The Chilkoot Trail is officially recognized as a National Historic Site of Canada.

1998

Spring and summer. The Klondike Gold Rush International Historic Park is officially designated in a ceremony held in Bennett.

Location

The Chilkoot Trail is accessed from the town of Skagway, Alaska. Skagway is accessible by road from Whitehorse.

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