



Foundation Document Overview

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park – Seattle Unit

Washington



Contact Information

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Purpose



Artifacts on display at Klondike – Seattle.

KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK – SEATTLE UNIT preserves, protects, and interprets the shared history associated with the Klondike Gold Rush (1896–1899)—including Seattle’s birth as a modern city—represented by the historic structures, stories, artifacts, and landscapes of that era, for the benefit and inspiration of all people.



Gold panning demonstration.

Significance

Significance statements express why Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park – Seattle Unit resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Klondike – Seattle commemorates a great human drama that changed the demographics, culture, and environment of the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, and the Yukon Territory.
- Klondike – Seattle preserves an integral link in the corridor of sites, events, and resources of the Klondike Gold Rush that extend across the United States and Canada into the Yukon goldfields.
- Klondike – Seattle provides outstanding and diverse opportunities for visitors to retrace the routes of the 1896–1899 Klondike Gold Rush through interpretation, allowing visitors to gain insight into the motivations, hardships, and personal accomplishments of the stampeders and entrepreneurs.
- Klondike – Seattle commemorates Seattle’s rise to international prominence as the gateway city for the Klondike Gold Rush and the innovative spirit that persists in the city’s character today.
- The park is an integral member of the local community and a key partner in the preservation and interpretation of the historic fabric of Pioneer Square Historic District—the hub of Klondike Gold Rush activity in Seattle.
- Klondike – Seattle connects diverse urban audiences with the national park system.



Sign hanging over the sidewalk at the Cadillac Hotel.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Education and Stewardship.** The sites of the Klondike, from Seattle to Dawson City, provide visitors with opportunities to learn and understand the geographically dispersed yet connected stories and events of the Klondike Gold Rush. The park fosters programs and opportunities that engage visitors in stewardship and advocacy activities across the sites of this international historical park.
- **Historical Artifacts.** The park preserves the original objects, records, and photos related to the legacy of the gold rush that link the greater Seattle area with the Klondike.
- **Transportation Hub and Corridors.** The park commemorates Seattle's role as the transportation hub used by the majority of stampeders to access the goldfields. It fosters opportunities for transportation providers along the international Klondike Gold Rush routes to interpret the stories and events of the gold rush.
- **Partnerships.** The park fosters partnerships to preserve and interpret Klondike Gold Rush cultural resources throughout the region. Public and private partners in the United States and Canada work to preserve and manage the gold rush sites in a coordinated and cooperative way.
- **Historic Landscape.** The park fosters the preservation of Seattle's turn-of-the-20th-century structures and their historic link to the railways and waterfront. The Cadillac Hotel is a representative example of a gold rush-era building and component structure of the Pioneer Square Historic District.
- **Historic Research.** The park and its partners continue to research, collect, and document the history of the Klondike Gold Rush.
- **Connection to Urban Audiences.** The park fosters programs and partnerships that connect visitors with opportunities to explore history and experience nature in nearby parks and public lands. The park leverages its urban location to support programs and opportunities that reach and engage diverse and underserved populations.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The Klondike Gold Rush story has an expansive geography and diverse demographics. The discovery of gold precipitated a large, sudden migration of people from across the globe to come to Seattle for supplies and embark on the gold rush routes that led to the Canadian Yukon, displacing indigenous populations and impacting the natural environment.
- As stampeders flooded the city, Seattle's city leaders capitalized on people's desire to take destiny into their own hands. Merchants and entrepreneurs met the sudden, huge demand for transportation to the north and for the supplies needed to survive the difficult, isolated existence that awaited the stampeders in the Klondike.
- The Klondike Gold Rush story for Seattle is one of beginnings; it is the economic boom that transformed Seattle from a town into a city, cemented its role as the anchor of the Pacific Northwest, and continues to draw people from across the country and the world seeking new opportunities, creative inspiration, and economic prosperity.
- Seattle's historic structures and artifacts of the Klondike Gold Rush era provide a backdrop for visitors to gain an understanding of the conditions that existed in this urban gateway to the goldfields at the first flush of gold fever in 1896.
- Klondike – Seattle cultivates community engagement and interpretive partnerships to integrate the Klondike Gold Rush story with the preservation of Seattle's historic setting, and to promote this historic vitality to a modern public.
- The location of the park in Seattle allows it to serve as a gateway to other public lands of the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, and Canada. The park works with its partners to encourage stewardship of, and advocacy for, public lands.

Description

The Seattle unit of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park preserves the story of the stampede to the Yukon goldfields, Seattle's crucial role in this event, and the era's long-lasting impacts on the Pacific Northwest.

On August 16, 1896, gold was discovered in the Klondike region of the Canadian Yukon. Nearly a year later, on July 17, 1897, the S.S. Portland docked in Seattle's harbor, bringing with it the first returning Yukon prospectors and their gold. It was in Seattle that the cry of "Klondike Gold" first grabbed the world's imagination. Seattle quickly became the "Gateway to the Gold Fields," the hub through which over 70,000 stampeders from all over the world passed. The city's entrepreneurs provided the transportation, lodging, supplies, and other resources necessary for the journey.

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park was authorized on June 30, 1976, and officially established in 1980. It is composed of three units in Alaska, and a unit in Seattle, Washington. In 1998, the four U.S. national park units and three sites in Canada partnered to establish Klondike Gold Rush International Historical Park.

Klondike – Seattle preserves and interprets the history and original objects, records, and photos of the Klondike Gold Rush (1896–1899) and Seattle's critical role in the gold rush. The park is based in the gold rush-era Cadillac Hotel building in the Pioneer Square Historic District of downtown Seattle. Klondike – Seattle fosters the preservation of intact historic structures from the Klondike era within the historic district, including their historic links to the railways and waterfront. In collaboration with the Alaska and Canada units, Klondike – Seattle helps commemorate the legacy of the Klondike Gold Rush by preserving its stories and artifacts; by continuing to research, collect, and document the era's history and events; and by exploring their connections to today's society.

Klondike – Seattle's location in the center of a major metropolitan area provides urban audiences with a critical link to the mission and diverse resources of the National Park Service. In addition to the Klondike Gold Rush history, Klondike – Seattle administers or supports a number of programs and sites in the Seattle area collectively referred to as Seattle Area National Park Sites. As a part of this role, Klondike – Seattle administers the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial, a satellite unit of Minidoka National Historic Site in Idaho. Klondike – Seattle also provides support to The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, a National Park Service Affiliated Area. The park's In My Backyard program aims to connect Seattle's urban population with Pacific Northwest parks, nature, and history. Klondike – Seattle also supervises an interagency public lands information office, the Outdoor Recreation Information Center, located in Seattle's flagship Recreational Equipment, Inc. store. Furthermore, Klondike – Seattle hosts the largest Trails & Rails programs in the National Park Service, managing an interpretive and educational guide program on two Amtrak routes.

