

Chilkoot Trail

Alaska
British Columbia

U.S. National Park Service
Parks Canada

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park

Today the National Park Service, Parks Canada, and the State of Alaska administer the 33 miles (53 km) of the Chilkoot Trail from Dyea, Alaska to Bennett, British Columbia. The trail you hike today departs in a few places from the historic trail.

Distances at major points on the trail are marked on the map. By comparing distances on the map and elevation gains on the trail profile, the difficulty of trail segments can be determined. The most severe section of the trail is from Sheep Camp to Happy Camp. Hikers should plan to start early in the day when traversing this section of the trail. For most hikers it is a full day of travel from Sheep Camp to Happy Camp.

International Cooperation

The United States National Park Service and Parks Canada, along with provincial, state, and local agencies, have cooperated in researching and planning the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park.

Park rangers and wardens are located in Skagway, Dyea, Sheep Camp, Lindeman City, and along the trail, to provide information and assistance to hikers and protect the natural and historical features of the trail. In case of injury, sickness, lost persons, or other emergency along the trail contact the nearest park officer. Off the trail contact the Skagway Police Department or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Whitehorse or Carcross.

History

The Chilkoot Pass has come to be a symbol of the Klondike stampede. The snow covered pass with a string of hundreds of packers inching their way up, remains in our minds as one of the most dramatic scenes of the Gold Rush. The Chilkoot Pass today remains a challenge to those who climb its lofty summit.

The Chilkoot Trail, long used as a trading route by the Chilkoot Indians, (Tlingit), and the Interior Indians, became a major route to the Canadian and Alaskan interior. Beginning in the 1880's, explorers, prospectors, and surveyors began to cross the pass in large numbers. By the time of the major Klondike Gold discoveries in 1896 nearly 2000 prospectors had already crossed into the Yukon River drainage. For the next two years the trail was an endless parade of anxious stampedeers.

Upon completion of the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad in July 1899, the bulk of the stampedeers diverted through Skagway and the White Pass. The importance of the Chilkoot Trail as a route to the Klondike began to wane. The trail was reopened in the 1960's as a summer hiking trail. Shelters, bridges, and trail work have made it a popular but difficult hike. The trail still retains reminders of the intense activity of the Klondike Gold Rush.



This Trail Is Not For Everyone

Do not underestimate the difficulties of this trail or overestimate your abilities. Many visitors find the trail extremely strenuous; the average visitor takes at least 3 days to complete the hike. In any weather some visitors are intimidated by the steep climb from the scales to the summit of the pass.

You Will Not Be Alone

The Chilkoot is not a wilderness hike. You will share the trail with many other hikers. The heaviest concentrations of visitors occur within several days following the arrival of the Alaska Marine Highway ferries in Skagway.

Getting To The Trailhead

Hikers are requested to obtain current information and trail conditions at the National Park Service Visitor Center in Skagway or the Parks Canada offices in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. Hikers beginning at the Alaska end of the trail should proceed to Dyea via Skagway. Transportation to Dyea, a distance of nine miles, may be obtained in Skagway. Upon completion of the hike at Bennett, hikers may entrain for Skagway or Whitehorse via the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad. The trip may be completed in reverse by proceeding to Bennett on the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad. Check train schedules before you leave to time your arrival to your best advantage.



Train Ticket Information

The White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad between Skagway, Alaska and Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, provides Chilkoot hikers with a convenient means of return to either Alaska or Canada. It is recommended that you make reservations and purchase tickets before hiking the trail. A meal is provided at Bennett for those holding train tickets.

There are no accommodations or other services available at Bennett. The historic railroad eating house provides meals for train passengers only. Hikers planning to entrain at Bennett are encouraged to time their arrival just prior to the scheduled meal time.

Natural Environment

While traveling over the pass between tidewater and Bennett, you will notice dramatic changes in climate, terrain and vegetation. Dyea is characterized by winds, relatively low precipitation and moderate temperatures. Below 3,000 feet (914 meters) lies the Pacific Northwest Coastal Rain Forest with dense stands of alder, cottonwood, aspen, western hemlock and Sitka spruce. Nearly all of this timber is second-growth because the valleys were denuded of trees during the gold rush. Understory plants such as mosses, ferns, devils club and mushrooms flourish in the mild marine climate.



As you approach the 3,000-foot (914 meters) level near the summit of Chilkoot Pass, the climate becomes subarctic. This Alpine Tundra Zone can receive up to 200 inches (508 cm) of snowfall per year. Here the winter temperatures dive to -50°F (-46°C). Plant life consists mainly of mosses, lichen, heaths, dwarf shrubs and lowgrowing willows.

On the decent from the pass into Canada, you will notice changes resulting from the rain barrier created by the Coast Range. This drier climate, the Boreal Forest Zone, creates a region of less dense forest consisting mainly of alpine fir, lodgepole pine, spruce, willow, and alder. Large areas on the Canadian side are devoid of trees. Mountain goat, black bear and moose inhabit the trail area. The harsh environment also supports smaller mammals such as wolves, porcupine, and squirrels. Grizzly (brown bear) and wolverines exist here but are seldom seen.

Weather and Hiking Conditions

Weather, one of the few uncontrollable aspects of your hike, provides the most potential for hazardous conditions and can cause rapid changes in trail conditions. Snow, sleet, hail, thunderstorms, and rain do occur during the summer. An inch of rain in 24 hours is not uncommon. In sunny weather your hike may seem easy; in continuous rain it may be extremely difficult. You must be prepared for all conditions.

Trail conditions below treeline are often rough with deep mud, standing water, slick rocks and roots making footing tricky. Conditions above treeline are more severe than below. **You will be above treeline for 8 miles (13 km)(Sheep Camp to Deep Lake).** High winds, driving rain, low temperatures, heavy fog and rocky terrain may make hiking this section extremely strenuous and difficult.

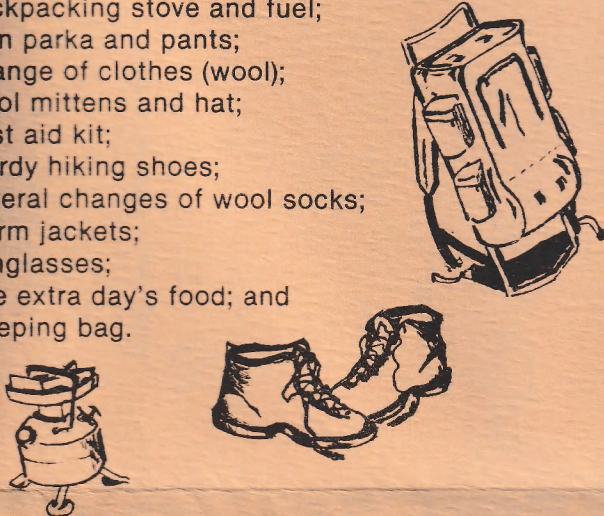
Snowfields between Sheep Camp and Happy Camp persist late into the summer months. On a sunny day, these can be blinding; on an overcast day, slick and icy. As the season progresses, these snowfields form ice bridges over streams and in between rocks. These ledges can be dangerous! Follow the most current trail markings not the foot prints of others. **Conditions change frequently.**



Be Prepared

We recommend that you take the following equipment as a minimum on a summer hike of the Chilkoot Trail:

- A lightweight tent complete with rain fly.
- Backpacking stove and fuel;
- Rain parka and pants;
- Change of clothes (wool);
- Wool mittens and hat;
- First aid kit;
- Sturdy hiking shoes;
- Several changes of wool socks;
- Warm jackets;
- Sunglasses;
- One extra day's food; and
- Sleeping bag.



You must be self sufficient for a hike across the Chilkoot Trail. **If you are unprepared, don't go.**

Camping

Camping is permitted in designated areas only. Designated camping areas are as follows:

- Sawmill
- Finnegan's Point
- Canyon City
- Pleasant Camp
- Sheep Camp
- Happy Camp
- Deep Lake
- Lindeman City
- Dan Johnson Lake
- Bare Loon Lake
- Bennett



Outhouses have been placed at these locations for visitor use. Shelters with wood stoves have been built at Canyon City, Sheep Camp, and Lindeman. These shelters cannot accommodate the high number of overnight users who are now visiting these areas. So that they may be shared by all, shelter use is for **drying out only**. Cabins are not to be used overnight during summer months.

Wood fires are permitted in shelter stoves and established metal fire rings only. A camp stove is recommended.

Wood supplies at the shelters are extremely limited, especially at Sheep Camp and Canyon City. High concentrations of hikers have burned available wood faster than nature can replace it. Please help conserve wood.

Hypothermia

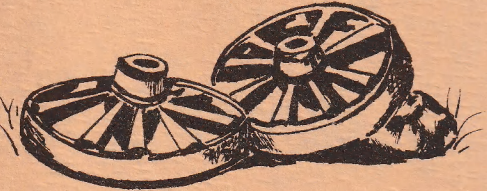
EXPOSURE TO WET, COLD, AND WINDY CONDITIONS CAN LEAD TO HYPOTHERMIA. Maintenance of your body's internal temperature is extremely important. If your body begins to lose heat more rapidly than it produces heat, your body temperature begins to drop. This is hypothermia. Continued drop in internal temperature will lead to stupor, collapse, and possibly death. Any of the following are symptoms:

1. Severe shivering;
2. Slurred speech, incoherence;
3. Clumsiness, lack of control of hands and feet
4. Drowsiness, exhaustion.

At the first sign of hypothermia you must get dry and warm. Remove all wet clothes, put on dry clothes, and consume hot drinks to restore body temperature. Continue moving as quickly as possible to produce internal heat or climb into a warm sleeping bag.

Historical Artifacts

You will encounter many items from the Klondike stampede as you hike the Chilkoot. These are the last remnants commemorating the passage of stampedeers over the Chilkoot Pass. Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park was established in part to protect these artifacts. The contrast between scenic grandeur and the remains of the stampedeers' goods and temporary structures makes the Chilkoot a unique backcountry trail.



In recent years, many artifacts have been stolen, damaged or destroyed. Items which have a special significance here become meaningless in the back of someone's closet. Instead of remaining an onsite exhibit they will probably be lost to the garbage, where no one can enjoy or learn from them.

These artifacts are extremely fragile. They have been subjected to 80 years or more of extreme weather conditions. Picking up an artifact may cause it to break or disintegrate. Sitting on an unstable log wall may hasten irreversible deterioration. Disturbing remains of artifacts may destroy clues for the researcher attempting to recreate the past.

REMEMBER—All artifacts are protected by State, Federal, and Provincial law. Protect these resources, leave them undisturbed, understand them where they lie. Take a photograph and leave the artifacts for others to enjoy.

Customs And Immigration

You cross the international boundary between Canada and the United States at the summit of the Chilkoot Pass. Because there is no customs station on the trail you must report to customs and immigration upon completing your hike.

No firearms can legally be taken into Canada over the trail. Hikers are discouraged from carrying firearms on the U.S. portion of the trail. If they are carried on the U.S. portion of the trail they must be broken down and packed away. Hikers may check guns with Skagway Police Department and the RCMP at Carcross or Whitehorse before beginning their hike.

Litter

Carry a litter bag and use it to keep the trail clean. Pack out everything you pack in and be sure you leave a clean camp. Litter can be a serious problem for you and future hikers if not disposed of properly. Litter left behind may attract bears and poison other animals.

Pets, Pack Animals, And Motorized Vehicles

Pets can be dangerous in bear country. For your own safety and the protection of your animal, leave your pet at home. If you bring a pet it must be kept on a leash and under control at all times.

Riding and pack animals are not permitted on the Chilkoot Trail.

Motorized vehicles are prohibited on the Chilkoot Trail.

Winter On The Chilkoot Trail

Weather conditions are extremely severe and unpredictable during winter months. Temperatures vary from -50°F (-46°C) to +30°F (-1°C). Heavy rain, snow, sleet, and winds over 50 mph (80 Kph) should be expected.

Conditions above treeline are especially severe. High winds and driving snow may prevent travel through open country. Visibility of less than 25 feet (8 meters) is common and there are no trail markers to follow. It is not recommended that you travel this trail in winter unless you have hiked the trail in the summer. Snowshoes and/or skis are essential. Other expedition equipment and clothing may be required. Snow avalanche hazards are severe in several areas along the trail. Extreme avalanche conditions may exist between Sheep Camp and Happy Camp.

There are no park personnel patrolling the Chilkoot Trail during the winter. You must accept a high level of responsibility for your own safety if you plan a trip at this time of year.

There is a permit system for off season travel on the trail. You may receive a permit at the National Park Service Office in Skagway. Weather, trail conditions, and other pertinent information can be obtained there also. We strongly recommend that you **do not** hike the trail alone; if you are injured you will have no way to send for help.

Recommended Reading

The Klondike Fever: The Life And Death Of The Last Great Gold Rush, Pierre Berton, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958, 457 pages.

Chilkoot Pass, Then And Now, Archie Satterfield, Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1973, 183 pages.

One Man's Gold Rush — A Klondike Album, Murray Morgan, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967, 213 pages.

Maps

Topographic maps of the region described in this brochure are as follows:

Dyea To Chilkoot Pass: Skagway B-1 & C-1; 1:63, 360 scale for sale at U.S. Geological Survey, Fairbanks, AK 99701.

Chilkoot Pass To Bennett: White Pass 104M/11 East & Homan Lake 104M/14 East; 1:50,000 scale for sale at Canada Map Office, Department Energy, Mines & Resources, 615 Booth Street, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E9.

