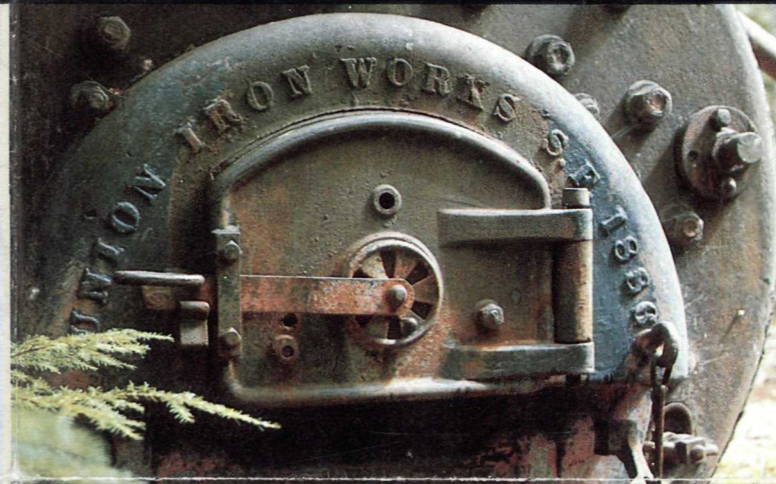


Klondike Gold Rush

National Historical Park
Skagway, Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



The Last Grand Adventure

With cries of "Gold! Gold in the Klondike!" there unfolded in the Yukon and Alaska an incredible historic adventure, whose theme of human endeavor in the face of adversity captured the imagination of people around the world. In August 1896 when George Washington Carmack and his two Indian companions, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie, found gold in a tributary of the Klondike River in Canada's Yukon Territory, they had no idea that they would set off one of the greatest gold rushes in history. True, most of the good claims were already staked by the time the rush really got underway in the summer of 1897; but this didn't stop an army of hopeful goldseekers from boarding ships at Seattle and other Pacific port cities and heading north to try their luck.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1897 and on into the winter, stampedeers poured into the newly created Alaskan tent and shack towns

of Skagway and Dyea—the jumping off points for the long (600-mile) trek to the goldfields. Skagway, founded by a former steambot captain named William Moore at the head of the White Pass Trail, quickly accumulated some 10,000 transient residents struggling to get their year's worth of gear and supplies over the Coast Range and down to the Yukon River headwaters at Lakes Lindeman and Bennett. Dyea, 9 miles away on the delta at the head of Taiya Inlet, endured the same frantic boomtown activity. Here, too, goldseekers poured ashore to pick their way up the Chilkoot Trail into Canada.

Stampedeers faced their greatest hardships on the Chilkoot Trail out of Dyea and the White Pass Trail out of Skagway. There were murders and suicides, disease and malnutrition, and death from hypothermia, avalanche, and, some said, heartbreak. Chilkoot was the toughest on men because

pack animals could not be used easily on the steep slopes leading to Chilkoot Pass and, until tramways were built in late 1897 and early 1898, the stampedeers had to carry everything on their backs. The White Pass Trail was the animal-killer, as anxious prospectors overloaded and beat their pack animals and forced them over the rocky terrain until they dropped. More than 3,000 animals died on this trail, many at the place called Dead Horse Gulch.

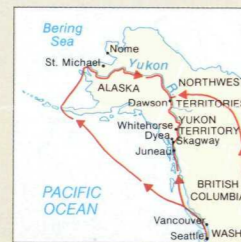
During the first year of the rush an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 goldseekers spent an average of 3 months packing their outfits up the Chilkoot and White Pass Trails to Lakes Lindeman and Bennett, where they built or bought boats to float the remaining 560 or so miles downriver to the Klondike and Dawson where an almost limitless supply of gold nuggets was said to lie. The distance from Skagway and Dyea to the lakes was only

about 33 miles, but each man trudged hundreds of miles back and forth along the trails, moving his gear from cache to cache. By mid-summer of 1898 there were 18,000 people at Dawson, with more than 5,000 working the diggings. By August many of the stampedeers had started for home, most of them broke. The next year saw a still larger exodus of miners when gold was discovered at Nome, Alaska. The great Klondike gold rush ended as suddenly as it had begun and towns like Dawson and Skagway began to decline; others, like Dyea, disappeared altogether, leaving only memories of what many considered to be the last grand adventure of the 19th century.

Towns and Wilderness

"The country is wild, rough and full of hardships for those unused to the rigors of Arctic winters. If a man makes a fortune he is liable to earn it by severe hardship and sufferings. But, then, grit, perseverance and luck will probably reward a hard worker with a comfortable income for life."

Clarence Berry, one of the miners returning on the *Portland*, quoted in *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 17, 1897.



Of the 3 routes to the Klondike shown on the map at left, most stampedeers in 1897-98 used the one via Skagway and Dyea. The all-water route via St. Michael and the Yukon River was the rich man's route and only those with extensive capital could afford it. The all-Canadian route, though advertised as "easy" by unscrupulous outfitters, was so tortuous that few who started out ever reached the goldfields.

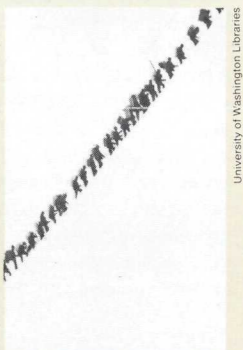


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Dyea (far left) and Skagway fought long and sometimes bitterly over which would get the largest share of Klondikers' money. Both towns offered departing and returning miners everything from complete outfits to temporary room and board, gambling, and women for a night. By mid-1898, thanks to the tramways and Skagway's lawless reputation, Dyea was attracting the most traffic. *Right:* Ascending Chilkoot Summit, 1897.



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Much of Skagway's early lawlessness was due to Jefferson Randolph "Soapy" Smith (right) and his gang of con-men and cutthroats. Soapy's short but lucrative career ended abruptly in the summer of 1898 when he was killed in a shootout with town surveyor Frank Reid, who was fatally wounded in the exchange. Canadian gold rush towns like Dawson experienced far less crime and disorder, thanks to the North West Mounted Police.



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Though not hazard-free, as the capsized miners at right discovered, the long river trip to Dawson was the easiest part of the stampedeers' journey. The hardships of the trails and the rotting corpses of pack animals at Dead Horse Gulch (right center) became only memories the closer they got to the goldfields. At far right, a group of goldseekers who have reached their objective display the results of their day's work.



Washington State Historical Society

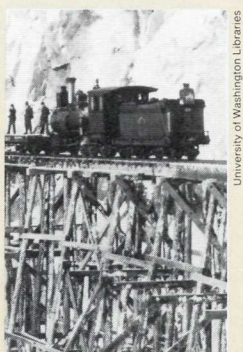


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The long struggle between Dyea and Skagway over which town would become the Gateway to the Klondike ended in Skagway's favor in the summer of 1899 when the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad (right) was completed between Skagway and Bennett. By July 1900, when the line was extended to Whitehorse, the Dyea tramways had been dismantled and the town itself was nearly abandoned. Soon it would be only a memory.



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Klondike Gold Rush

Skagway and Dyea

Skagway, once the major gateway to the Klondike, today contains a remarkable number of historic structures from the fabulous gold rush days. Most of these are located within the Skagway Historic District (see map) where private, city, State, and Federal interests have joined together to retain and restore, where feasible, the setting of Skagway's past. Already within the District the boardwalks, false-fronted buildings, dirt streets, and horse-drawn wagons help to evoke some of the atmosphere pervading the town during the gold rush era.

Park rangers are on duty at the visitor center during the summer to provide information about the park. Walking tours and other interpretive programs are presented from June through Labor Day. Commercial tours are available by bus, taxi, and aircraft.

Other things to see and do include visits to the Trail of '98 Museum and the Gold Rush Cemetery (where Soapy Smith and Frank Reid are buried), hikes into the mountains above town, and a trip to the townsite of Dyea, reached from Skagway via a 9-mile dirt road.

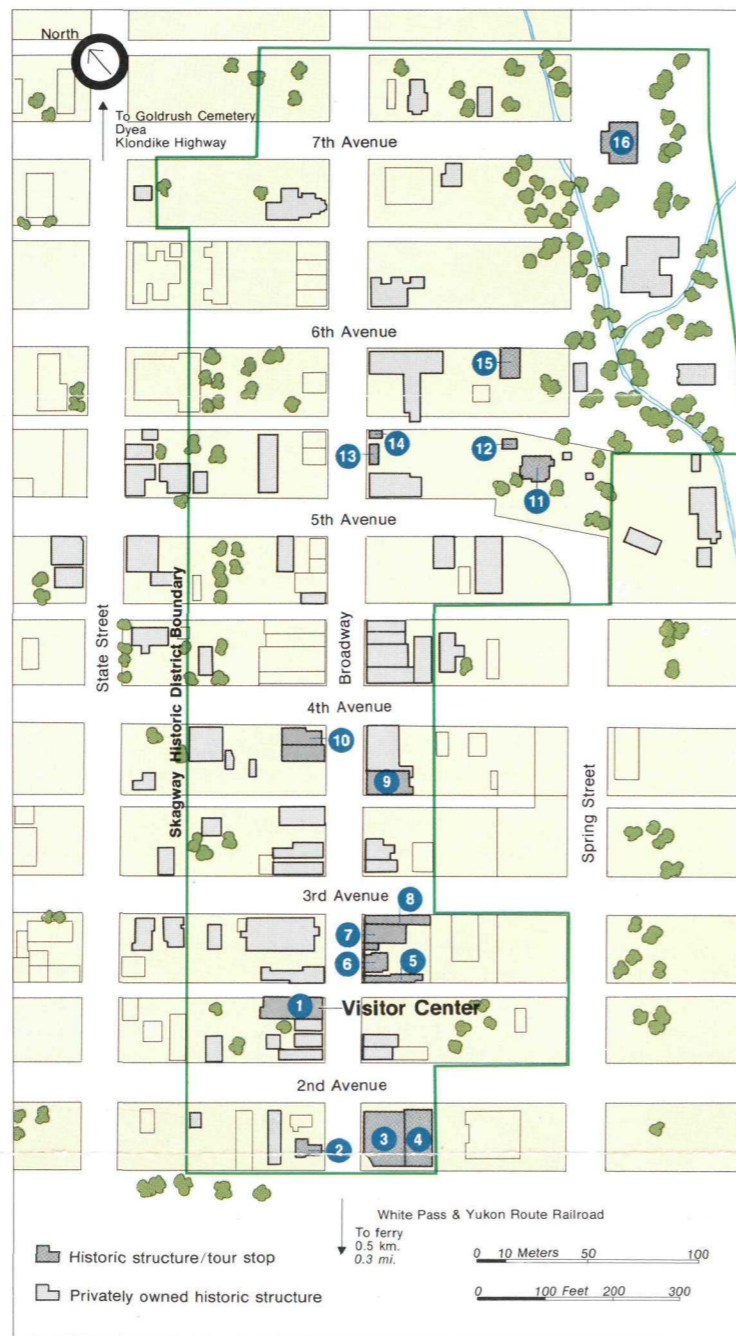
Dyea, gateway to Chilkoot Pass, once rivaled Skagway as the largest town in Alaska. After the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad was opened between Skagway and Bennett, Dyea underwent an abrupt decline, leaving hotels, banks, and stores vacant. Most of the buildings were torn down and the lumber used elsewhere. Today all that remains are some scattered foundation ruins, the rotting stubs of once-extensive wharfs, and the Slide Cemetery where some 60 victims of a spring avalanche on the Chilkoot Trail lay buried—poignant reminders of the hardships, uncertainties, and tragedies of Klondike times.

A word of caution: While walking around Skagway you will encounter on-going preservation projects. Be alert for hazards and avoid loose boards, ladders, and braces. We encourage you to look around and into the buildings, but, for your safety, do not get too close to buildings under construction. Remember, too, that many of Skagway's buildings are privately owned. Respect the rights of their owners.

Many gold rush-era buildings still stand within the Skagway Historic District. The following are some of the more prominent ones. Their locations are keyed, by number, to the map. The date of construction follows the building's name.

- 1 Arctic Brotherhood Hall (1899). Presently serves as the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park visitor center.
- 2 Martin Itjen House (1901).
- 3 White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad Depot (1898).
- 4 White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad General Offices (1900).
- 5 Verbaudhede Confectionary (1899).
- 6 Boas Tailoring Shop (1899).
- 7 Pacific Clipper Line Office (1898).
- 8 Mascot Saloon (1898).
- 9 Lynch & Kennedy Dry Goods Store (1908).
- 10 Pantheon Saloon (1898).
- 11 Ben Moore House (1897).
- 12 Captain Moore's Cabin (1887).
- 13 Boss Bakery (1897).
- 14 Goldberg Cigar Store (1897).
- 15 Peniel Mission (1900).
- 16 City Hall and Museum (1899).

For a more detailed walking guide to the Historic District, check at the visitor center for the pamphlet called "Skagway: Some Steps on the Gold Rush Trail."



International Regulations
Because of the international character of the park, customs and immigration laws require that anyone traveling to Carcross or beyond must report to Canadian Customs in Whitehorse. Any-

one traveling from Canada to Skagway must report to U.S. Customs and Immigration authorities in Skagway.
Handguns are prohibited by law in Canada and must be left with the Skag-

way Police Department. In the United States, firearms must be broken down and encased when traveling within the park. Hunting is not permitted in the park.
All artifacts within the

park are considered to be of international historic significance and are protected by Federal, Territorial, Provincial, and State laws. Park visitors are cautioned not to remove or deface any item. Severe penalties are pro-

vided for violations of these regulations.
Administration
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the In-

terior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 517, Skagway, AK 99840, is in charge of the Skagway, Dyea, Chilkoot Trail, and White Pass Trail units.

Chilkoot and White Pass Trails

The most challenging way to follow in the footsteps of the stamperders is by hiking the 33-mile Chilkoot Trail, accessible only on foot. It is a difficult hike and usually takes 3-5 days. The trail begins at the bridge near the Dyea townsite and travels over Chilkoot Pass to Lake Bennett. Along the way you will see historic ruins and artifacts from the Days of '98. Before starting your hike, however, you should obtain current trail information from the National Park Service in Skagway or from the Parks Canada office in Whitehorse. A detailed map and guide is available at the NPS visitor center in Skagway.

The White Pass Trail out of Skagway is not accessible on foot, but the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad, which has been operating continuously since the gold rush days, makes daily runs from Skagway to Bennett and Whitehorse. This less-strenuous method of following this historic route to the Klondike affords abundant opportunities to view magnificent scenery and occasional wildlife from the comfort of a coach car. Half-day, round-trip excursion trains run over White Pass in the summer.

Automobile travel over White Pass is also available (during summer only) via the Klondike Highway, enabling visitors to stop at several turnouts above the pass and view several exhibits on White Pass City and the role of transportation in the gold rush.

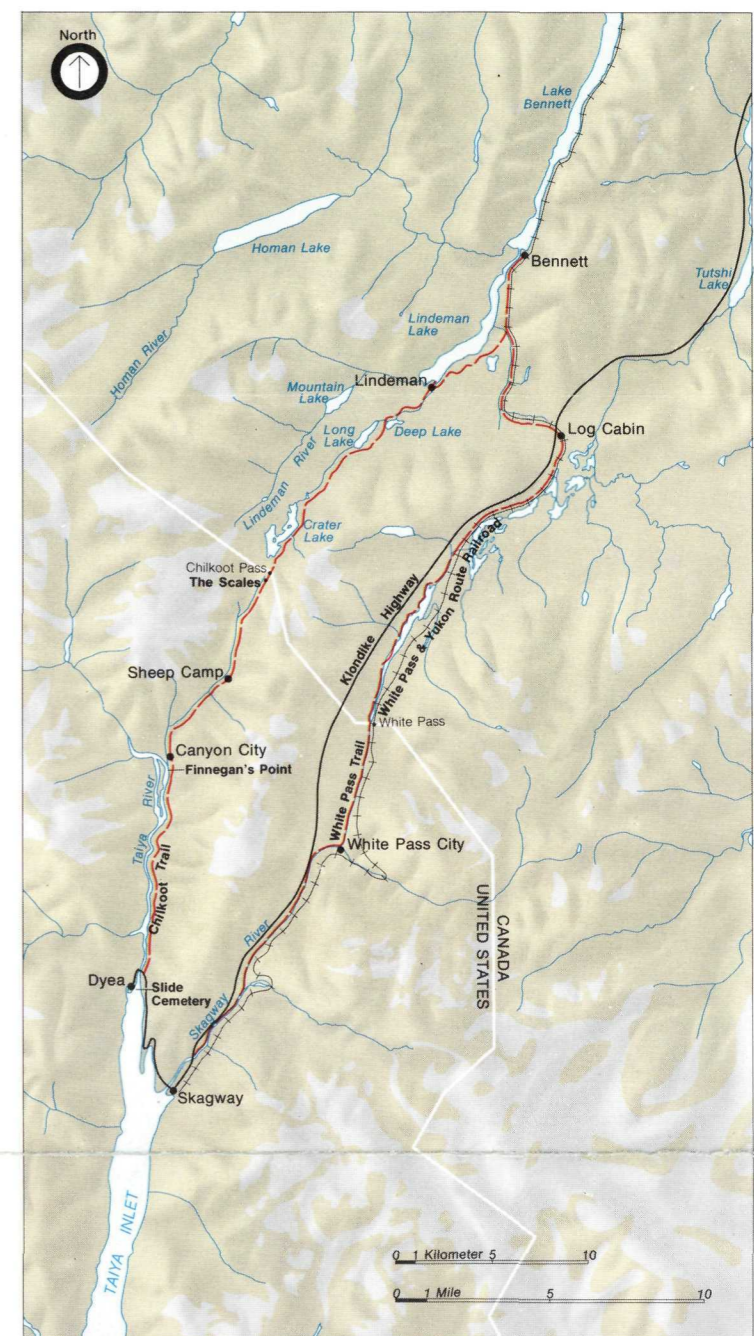
Warning: Before embarking on a hike over the Chilkoot Trail, you *must* be properly outfitted. Weather conditions can change rapidly from hour to hour, especially in the summit area. You must be prepared for cold temperatures, snow, rain, fog, wind, swamps, and snow fields. Proper equipment includes warm clothing (preferably wool), sturdy rain gear (not plastic), tent with waterproof fly, campstove and adequate fuel (there is no wood in the summit area and campfires are not allowed at all on the Canadian portion), good hiking boots, adequate food plus emergency rations, and a first-aid kit. Be especially alert for symptoms of *hypothermia*—a lowering of body temperature that results in uncontrollable shivering, disorientation, and, possibly, death.

Climate, vegetation, and wildlife
While traveling over the passes between tidewater and Bennett, you will notice dramatic changes in climate, terrain, and vegetation. Skagway is characterized by high winds, low precipitation, and moderate temperatures. Below 3,000 feet, the Pacific Coastal Rain Forest offers dense, mostly second growth, stands of alder, cottonwood, aspen, western hemlock, and Sitka spruce. Understory plants such as liverwort, ladyfern, and Devils club flourish in the mild marine climate.

As you approach the 3,000 foot level near the summits of Chilkoot and White Passes, the climate becomes subarctic. Temperatures may dive to -50° in the winter. This *Alpine Tundra Zone* can receive up to 200 inches of snowfall per year. Plantlife consists mainly of mosses, lichen, heaths, dwarf-shrubs and low-growing willows.

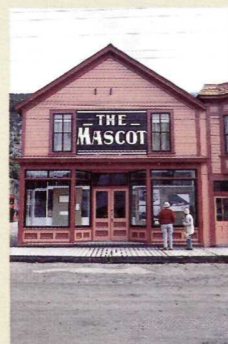
Descending into Canada, you notice further changes resulting from the rain barrier created by the Coast Range. This drier climate, the *Boreal Forest Zone*, creates a region of less-dense forest consisting mainly of alpine fir, lodgepole pine, and spruce. Cottonwood and aspen grow in the water areas.

Bear, moose, and other wild animals may be encountered along the trails. All are potentially dangerous. Do not approach them or feed them. Make noise as you hike, since animals are most dangerous when startled or cornered. Seal food in containers and hang them from trees so that animals will not be attracted by food odors. Do not throw your garbage away or bury it.



Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park lies in one of the world's most spectacular geographic areas, containing an almost endless array of islands, mountains, glaciers, rivers, lakes, and forests.

Fortunately, within this essentially unspoiled geographic setting, the United States and Canada have been able to maintain a wealth of historic structures and artifacts. During your visit, you



Skagway

are likely to encounter, especially along the Chilkoot Trail, many of these last tangible reminders of the gold rush days: telegraph wire and poles, boots, rusty tin cans, lichen-covered milled wood, bedsprings, bullets, horseshoes and horse bones, ruins of log structures, tent canvas, tramway guide wheels, rusty cookware, and broken china and stemware.

We urge you to leave them undisturbed. The

contrast between scenic grandeur and the humble remains of the stamperders' goods and temporary structures is what helps to make the park a unique and unforgettable experience.



Dyea Wharf



Slide Cemetery



Relics of the Gold Rush

How to Reach the Park
Skagway, the starting point for your visit, can be reached year-round by scheduled and chartered air service via Juneau, Haines, and Whitehorse; by automobile and bus via the Alaska and Klondike Highways; by train from Whitehorse; or by boat from Seattle, Prince Rupert, Ketchikan, Wrangell, Petersburg, Sitka, Juneau, and Haines. Reservations are needed for train and boat travel.



Alaska Vista