

# Klondike Gold Rush

National Historical Park/Seattle, Washington  
National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior



The national historical park in Seattle's Pioneer Square Historic District

Here in Seattle the cry of "Klondike gold!" first grabbed the world's imagination. It was July 1897. Through this modest waterfront city tens of thousands of Yukon-bound goldseekers soon poured. Stamping Seattle with a special legacy, they jump-started the depressed Northwest economy and enhanced Seattle's reputation as a regional trade center. The Chamber of Commerce aggressively touted Seattle as the "only place" to outfit for the goldfields. Sales did soar—to \$25 million by early 1898. Shopkeepers stacked their stock 10 feet deep on the storefront boardwalks (see the photo below left). The scurrying stampede bought supplies, boarded ships berthed nearby, and steamed north for Skagway and Dyea or northwest to St. Michael and the Yukon River. Explore today's Pioneer Square Historic District and discover its fascinating reminders of those 1890s Gold-Rush glory days that this park commemorates. The map below shows where businesses outfitted stampede and suggests the Gold Rush-era setting of the docks and waterfront in 1898.

Visit the National Park Service Visitor Center (photo above) at 117 So. Main Street. The Pioneer Square Historic District's 25 blocks of 1890s vintage architecture include the Pioneer Building (at right and below). It was Seattle's birthplace, and today it features the nation's largest concentration of buildings from the 1890s.



NPS photo

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National Historical Park/Skagway, Alaska  
National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior



Hikers on the Golden Stairs, Chilkoot Trail

Richard Hartmier Photography

Once the major gateway to the Klondike, Skagway still has many historic buildings from its Gold Rush days. Far less evident now is how Dyea, nine miles north by unpaved road, rivaled it then as Alaska's largest town. Abandoned once the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad was built, Dyea was eventually dismantled. In today's Skagway Historic District (see map below) private, city, state, and federal interests have cooperated to preserve or restore the late-1890s atmosphere. Guided walking tours explore the town in summer. Ask about these and other programs at the Visitor Center in the former railroad depot. You can also visit the Trail of '98 Museum and nearby Gold Rush Cemetery. Skagway's criminal boss Jefferson Randolph ("Soapy") Smith lies buried there. The national historical park contains 13,191 acres of National Park Service, city, state, and private lands. In 1998, Canada's Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site, the Thirty Mile Heritage River (Yukon River), and Dawson Historic Complex National Historic Site, and the United States' Seattle, Skagway, Chilkoot Trail, and White Pass units were designated as the Klondike Gold Rush International Historical Park.



This is Broadway seen from the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad Depot, today's Visitor Center in the Skagway Historic District. From the left are the Red

Onion Saloon, a former produce store and a steamship office, and the Arctic Brotherhood Hall. A gold dome tops the Golden North Hotel. Dedman's Photo Shop



The Pioneer Building dominated both Seattle's skyline and its Gold Rush-era commerce. Built in 1892, it faces historic Pioneer Place (see map below). Between 1897 and 1908, the building housed 48 mining firms. Today's Underground Seattle tours start here at Doc Maynard's Tavern.

August 1897



Boombtown Skagway grew by leaps and bounds as this photo sequence, looking down Broadway street, shows. Where only tents stood in August 1897, by

December 1897



December wooden buildings lined Broadway, and continuous boardwalk ran down its west side. Less than two years later, in 1899, local ordinance required

1899



boardwalks on both sides of Broadway and brick chimneys. Note the railroad tracks and utility poles: Skagway had come of age.

## Seattle

The Seattle unit of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park and its Visitor Center are in the Union Trust Annex, 117 So. Main St., two blocks north of the football stadium. The Visitor Center is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. It is closed January 1, Thanksgiving Day, and December 25.

Ask at the Visitor Center about the schedule of walking tours and other programs and activities. Exhibits and audio-visual programs there tell the story of Seattle's crucial

role as the staging area for the Klondike Gold Rush.

Parking is available on the street and at several nearby locations. Bus stops, the train station, and local ferries are within walking distance.

The heart of Gold-Rush Seattle, Pioneer Square Historic District features shops, art galleries, restaurants, and book and antique stores. Many Gold Rush-era buildings still stand in the historic district. Ask at the Visitor

Center for a map to help you identify them.

To the north, Waterfront Park sits where the ship *Portland* docked with 68 prospectors whose cargoes of gold launched the Klondike Gold Rush.

For information contact: Superintendent, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, 117 So. Main St., Seattle WA 98104-2540; 206-553-7220; or visit [www.nps.gov/kigr/](http://www.nps.gov/kigr/) home.htm on the Internet.

## Seattle in 1898



## Skagway

From Skagway stampedeers started across the coastal mountains to the Yukon River headwaters enroute to Dawson City, Canada, and the goldfields. The map at right will help you explore the Skagway Historic District's Gold Rush-era ambience. The National Park Service Visitor Center in the restored White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad Depot at Second Avenue and Broadway is open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily in summer.

As the Gold Rush began, Skagway got so lawless it lost traffic to Dyea because of "Soapy" Smith's criminal activities. Town surveyor Frank Reid killed Smith in a July 8, 1898, shootout and was fatally wounded himself.

Hiking the 33-mile Chilkoot Trail from near the Dyea townsite provides an

opportunity to experience the challenges goldseekers faced. Parks Canada, which manages the upper (northern half) of the trail requires user permits. For Chilkoot Trail permits and reservations, call 800-561-0496 or 867-667-3910 in Whitehorse. For information on trail conditions or to obtain maps or other information, visit The Trail Center at Broadway and Second Avenue in Skagway, or call 907-983-3655 during the summer. Plan your trip carefully, travel safely, and be prepared for severe weather conditions at any time.

The White Pass Trail has disappeared in many places. It should not be attempted.

Anyone traveling between Canada and the United States must report either to Canadian Customs at

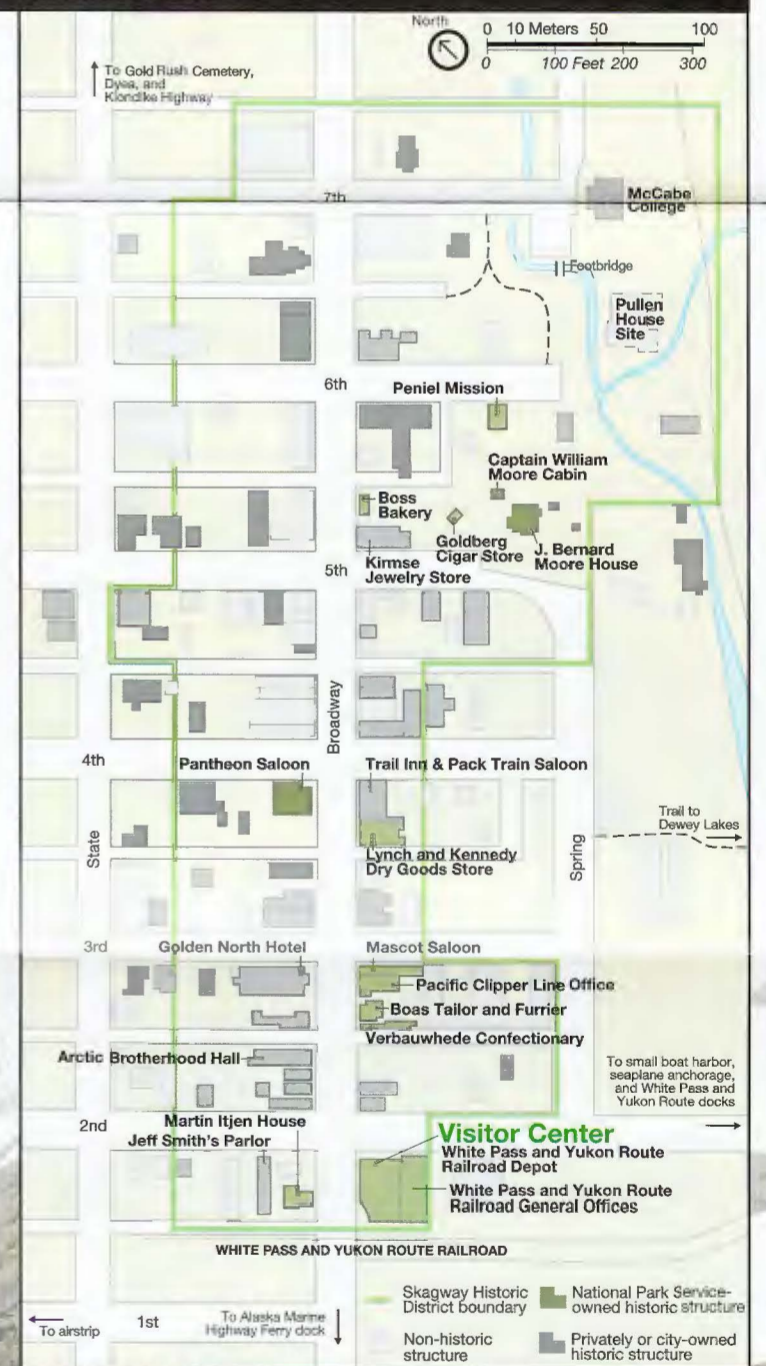
Fraser or to U.S. Customs and Immigration authorities at Skagway.

All historic relics and materials in the park are considered to be of national and international significance and are protected by law. They must not be disturbed or removed. Please leave no trace of your Chilkoot experience.

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 areas that are important examples of our nation's natural and cultural heritage.

For information contact: Superintendent, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, P.O. Box 517, Skagway, AK 99840-0517; 907-983-2921; or visit [www.nps.gov/kigo/](http://www.nps.gov/kigo/) on the Internet.

## Skagway Today



Approaching Chilkoot Pass summit you look back over the stampedeers' route toward Dyea and the Lynn Canal. Do not let this snow fool you—this photo does not show the winter conditions many gold seekers labored in with their gear. Snowfall at

this elevation can be 200 inches per year. Temperatures can dip to -50°F in the winter. Above the treeline here, you enter the world of the caribou, Dall sheep, mountain goat, pika and Arctic ground squirrel. Richard Hartmier Photography

# Klondike Gold Rush

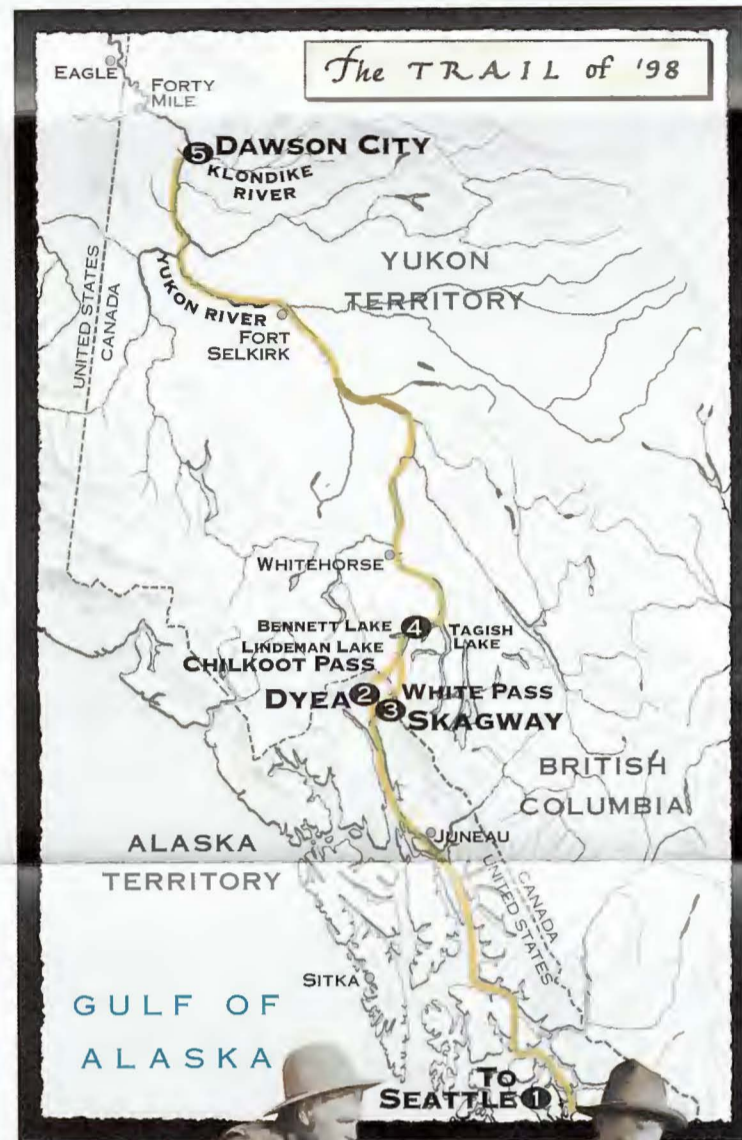
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park  
Alaska / Washington

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide

## LONG TRAIL TO THE KLONDIKE

**GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!** screamed the headline, launching 100,000 people on a quest for wealth in 1897 and 1898. Struggling against time, each other, and the northern wilderness, the stampede rushed to strike it rich because of an August 16, 1896 discovery near where the Klondike and Yukon rivers join in northwestern Canada. On this last grand adventure of its time, a few struck it rich, many discovered themselves, but none was unchanged by the experience. In 1893, U.S. gold reserves plummeted and the stock market crashed: the panic left millions hungry, depressed, and destitute. The promise of adventure and quick wealth seemed like the antidote for the nation's maladies.



### PIONEER OUTFITTERS

Numbers (1 to 4) on the map at left match numbered paragraphs about the major routes taken to Dawson and the gold fields (5). Most stampedeers chose the Chilkoot Pass or the White Pass, and then floated down the Yukon. Fewer than 3,000 took the all-water "rich man's route" (see map at right).



The Klondike Gold Rush was well documented with photographs. Hopeful stampedeers posed in front of painted backdrops in Seattle studios. Few realized what hardships awaited on the vast, wild canvas of interior Canada's Yukon—or the rugged trails leading to the gold fields.

## Dyea = Klondike Transportation Company

### DYEA & THE CHILKOOT TRAIL

**2** At Dyea the Pacific Ocean's tides wash against coastal mountains rising at the delta of the Taiya River. Before the gold rush the Chilkoot tribe of the Tlingit Nation controlled the strategic Chilkoot Pass trade route over the coast mountains to interior First Nation peoples. The 33-mile Chilkoot Trail links tidewater Alaska to the Canadian headwaters of the Yukon River, the latter a navigable route to the Klondike gold fields. In all, more than 30,000 gold seekers toiled up its Golden Stairs, a hellish quarter-mile climb gaining 1,000 vertical feet, the last obstacle of the Chilkoot. Most scaled the pass 20 to 40 times, shutting their required ton of goods—a year's supply—north to the border for North West Mounted Police approval to enter Canada. No exact international boundary had been set, but Canada's regulation prevented starvation in the interior and protected its claim to all lands north of the passes. Wilderness advocate John Muir was in southeastern Alaska to study glaciers when the stampede happened. He wrote that gold-rush Dyea and Skagway "looked like anthills someone stirred with a stick."

## SEATTLE & BEYOND

**1** The steamship *Excelsior* offloaded miners heavy with gold at San Francisco on the evening of July 14, 1897. The *Portland* docked at Seattle the morning of July 17, preceded by a reporter on a tugboat touting "more than a ton of solid gold on board." (In fact it was more than two tons.) Among these first Klondike millionaires were former Seattle YMCA Secretary Tom Lippy and wife Salome. They had ventured north on Tom's hunch in March 1896 just before the discovery. They brought back \$80,000 on the *Excelsior* and would eventually take nearly \$2 million from the richest Klondike claim of all. The stampede was on: within days all possible passage north to Alaska was booked.

Seattle's merchants captured most of the Klondike outfitting trade. The city's railroad links to the East, and its docks gave it advantages. However, shrewd promotion linked Seattle in the public's mind with Canada's gold fields. From June 1896 to June 1899 Seattle's new assay office handled \$6.5 million in gold. In that period city merchants sold more than \$10 million in supplies.



Seattle shipping boomed as its docks bustled with stampedeers. The rush strengthened the city's links to Alaska, Canada, and Asia.

The all-water route from Seattle to St. Michael in Alaska, then up the Yukon to Dawson (see the map at right) cost more than most stampedeers could pay. Nearly 2,000 tried a difficult, all-land route through Alberta. The handful who made it to Dawson took nearly two years, arriving after the rush was over.



A menagerie of horses, donkeys, mules, goats, dogs, elk, reindeer, and oxen carried outfits and merchant goods. This ox may have fared better than most horses. One entrepreneur advertised gophers trained to tunnel right to the gravels that bore gold!

What a loaf of bread! A limited diet of beans, bacon, and bread, lacking the vitamin C from fresh produce, made scurvy all too common.

### SKAGWAY & WHITE PASS

**3** A better port than Dyea, Skagway soon became the "Gateway to the Klondike." It was wild, with something for everyone. Confidence artists and thieves—led by Jefferson Randolph "Soapy" Smith—and greedy merchants lightened the unwary's loads. A modern city, Skagway had electric lights and telephones. It had 80 saloons, three breweries, many brothels, and other service and supply businesses.

The White Pass route was 10 miles longer—but its summit less steep and 600 feet lower—than the Chilkoot Trail. In two months overuse destroyed it. Its second life began as British investors started building the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad in May 1898. Rails reached White Pass Summit in February 1899, Bennett Lake in July 1899, and Whitehorse in July 1900. The railroad speeded abandonment of Dyea and Chilkoot Trail developments. By then the rush was over.



Falsely called an all-weather trail, the White Pass route's boulder fields, sharp rocks, and muskox earned it the name Dead Horse Trail. In the winter of 1897-1898, 3,000 horses died on it—"like mosquitoes in the first frost," Jack London observed. Some were beaten to death by desperate stampedeers.



At the summits of Chilkoot and White passes, Canada's Mounties gave properly outfitted stampedeers official entry into Canada. "It didn't matter which one you took," said a stampedeer who had traveled both the Chilkoot and White Pass trails, "you'd wished you had taken the other."



The "ton of goods" gives a good physical sense of a stampedeer's life and diet. Considered essential were 350 pounds of flour, 150 of bacon, and 100 each of beans and sugar. Outfits cost \$250 to \$500.

The Chilkoot Trail's fabled Golden Stairs humbled argonauts intent on the summit. This vivid image—an endless line of prospectors struggling under enormous loads like worker ants—became the icon of the Klondike gold rush. It took three months and 20 to 40 trips to carry their ton of goods over the pass.



Whipsawing trees into planks (right), stampedeers built boats and rafts and waited for the long Arctic winter to end.

## N. W. M. P.

DAWSON, Nov. 18, 1898.  
THE Commissioner of the Yukon Territory orders that no person will be permitted to enter the Territory without satisfying the N. W. M. P. Officers at Tagish and White Horse Rapids that they have with them two months' supplies of provisions and at least \$200 in cash, or six months' supplies and not less than \$200 in cash, and above the money required to pay expenses from the border to Dawson. This order will not apply to residents of the Yukon Territory returning, if they are identified and prove their competence to pay their way into the country.



Women and even a few children joined the stampede. These prostitutes called themselves "actresses." Many gold-rush women were spouses, mining partners, or business owners.

### Isaac, Chief of Chilkoot's Packing a Specialty

Chiefs Doniwak (standing) and Isaac of the Chilkoot tribe of the Tlingit Nation were pivotal in transmountain packing and trading as gold prospecting increased in Canada's interior. As the Klondike stampede intensified, the demand for Native packers exceeded the supply. Pack horses, aerial tramways, and other schemes would soon reduce the Chilkoot's packing business.

### YUKON RIVER VIA BENNETT LAKE

**4** It took three months to cross the mountains to the interior. Then most of the 30,000 stampedeers sat out the winter of 1897-1898 in tents by frozen lakes Lindeman, Bennett, and Tagish—still 550 miles from the gold fields. Here they built 7,124 boats from whipsawed green lumber and waited for the lake ice to melt. Finally, on May 29, 1898, the motley flotilla set out. In the next few days five men died, and 150 boats were crushed in raging rapids near Whitehorse. After the rapids it was a long, relatively easy trip, but bugs and 22-hour sunlit days drove boats nearly mad. Near Dawson some feuding parties split up—halving even boats and frypans. Finally, Dawson!

*John M. P. ... Dave Lowry ... shot the Rapids ... through on 24th ... Boat 16 ft long 3 1/2 ft high*



A hundred miles of lakes led into the Yukon River, where canyon rapids soon led to smooth water beyond Whitehorse.

## LIFE IN DAWSON & AT THE GOLDFIELDS

**5** Before the gold rush, only a few Han First Nations people camped on the small island at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike rivers. Prospecting in the area, George Washington Carmack, Keish ("Skookum Jim" Mason), and Kaa Goox (Dawson Charley) struck gold on August 16, 1896, on Rabbit (later named Bonanza) Creek. On August 17, they filed claims in Fortymile, the nearest town, 50 miles downriver. This sparked the first stampede as prospectors already in the interior heard the news via the informal bush communication network. Former Fortymile trader and grubstaker Joseph Ladue shrewdly platted Dawson City and made a fortune selling lots.

Dawson City boomed. It quickly became Canada's largest city west of Winnipeg and north of Vancouver, with a population of 30,000 to 40,000. It stretched for two miles along the Yukon, fairly bulging with goldseekers. Anything desired could be had—for a price. One fresh egg cost \$5, an onion \$2, a gallon of whiskey \$40. Most stampedeers did not reach Dawson until late June 1898, however, nearly two years after the big discovery. By then prospectors already in the region had long since staked the known gold fields. Facing this reality, many disillusioned stampedeers sold their gear and supplies for steamboat fare to the out-

side as their visions of wealth were washed away. Canadian historian Pierre Berton writes that many stampedeers arrived in Dawson and simply wandered about, utterly disoriented by its frantic activity, and not bothering to prospect at all. Played out over such vast space and time, it seems that for many, the adventure itself was the biggest attraction of the Klondike Gold Rush. Mining itself was another story.

To get through the permafrost (perennially frozen soils), miners built fires to melt a shaft down to where the gold lay. Two men digging for a winter used 30 cords of firewood they cut themselves (until the stampede labor pool arrived). Miners dug shafts down to the gold just above bedrock, deep below layers of frozen muck and gravel. At bedrock, miners tunneled out, "drifting" along the gold-bearing gravels of the old stream course. Dirt and gold-bearing "pay gravel" were hoisted out of the hole and piled separately for spring and summer sluicing (washing away the dirt and gravel), once sunlight thawed the dumps and streams. Reporting from on the scene, journalist Tappan Adney said that—considering the cost of reaching the country and the cost of working the mines—"The Klondike is not a poor man's country."



In both Dawson and Seattle more fortunes were made off miners than by mining. By 1906 Klondike gold exceeded \$108 million at \$16 per ounce.

From 30,000 to 40,000 people reached the gold fields. About 4,000 found gold, and a hundred struck it rich, but only a handful would keep their fortunes. More than 300 stampedeers wrote memoirs of their Klondike quest, heralding the greatest adventure of their lives.



Compare these real miners in a Klondike drifting tunnel to the stampedeers posing in the Seattle studio, shown above. Both photos reflect the same gold rush—one as a romantic notion, one as a harsh reality—the last grand adventure of its kind that the world will ever know.