

Klondike Gold Rush International Historical Park

Chilkoot Trail - Then and Now



Stampedeers on the Golden Stairs - circa 1898



Stampedeers on the Golden Stairs - circa 2003

A Trail with a Past

When you hike the Chilkoot Trail you are following in the footsteps of Tlingit traders, explorers, and gold rush stampedeers. Tlingit traders established the trail, transporting fish oil and other coastal products to interior people to trade for animal skins, fur clothing and copper. When news of gold discoveries in the Yukon spread throughout the world, the Chilkoot became the most popular route to the gold fields. Between 1897 and 1898, thousands of people of all genders, races and lifestyles stampeded across the trail. While they came with dreams of wealth and adventure, most found hardship and challenge on the Chilkoot Trail. The sense of awe and accomplishment, however, was what they remembered when they returned home to tell their tales. What tales will you tell?

Trail or Trial?

Stampedeers found the trail very difficult. It was more wilderness path than the smooth ascent they were led to expect. The trail today varies from easy to difficult with some sections merely a marked route through boulders. It is not for beginning backpackers or small children. It is recommended that the hike be done following the route of the stampedeers, from Dyea on the coast to Bennett in the interior. This route allows the wind and weather to be at your back

and makes for a safer trip as you will be ascending the steepest sections, saving your knees. Be prepared for weather conditions to be anything from nice to nasty. Coastal storms with rain, sleet and fog often engulf the pass but you may be lucky to experience beautiful, clear summer days. Like the best prepared of the stampedeers, if you are in shape the trail will be less a trial of your stamina.

Timing Your Trip

Stampedeers hiked the trail in winter! This enabled them to make numerous trips to carry their goods over the pass and build boats at Bennett in time for spring thaw so they could then float on to the Klondike. This was possible only with collective effort and great hardship. We suggest you do not follow their example. The best conditions are generally from early July to mid-August,

but this is also the busiest time. Hiking in June or early July you will encounter snow and ice along the route. In early June snowshoes may be required. Avalanche hazard persists along portions of the route until mid-July. Hiking later in the summer means shorter hours of daylight, a greater chance of rain, but fewer bugs and hikers. Plan at least three to five days for your hike.

Permits/Fees

During the stampede hundreds of people hiked the Chilkoot each day. In order to maintain a high quality hiking experience these days, and to minimize impact on resources, a maximum of 50 hikers per day are allowed to enter Canada over the Chilkoot Pass. Maximum group size is 12; only one large group (9-12) is permitted to cross the pass on any given day. Every person overnighing on the trail, and day users on the Canadian portion of the trail, require a permit. Permit fees are collected to help offset the cost of trail/facility

maintenance and information services. Reservations are highly recommended for July and August hikes.

Fees (prices in Canadian funds):

Entire Trail	\$50.00/adult
US side only	\$15.70/adult
Canadian side only	\$34.30 /adult
Reservations	\$11.70/ hiker

Youth ages 5- 16 half adult price.

Your "Ton of Goods"

During the gold rush stampedeers were required to carry sufficient supplies to ensure they could support themselves for a year in the remoteness of the Yukon. Outfits typically consisted of a ton of goods. Fortunately these days our backpacking gear is lightweight and we need only be prepared for a trip of three to five days instead of the several months it would have taken the stampedeers to move their outfits over the trail. Hikers need to be

totally self sufficient and be able to deal with emergency situations on their own as there are no services and very limited facilities along the trail. Of special note: open fires are not permitted on the trail. You must carry a cook stove. Water filters are necessary to treat water along the trail. Bring heavy cord or light rope to hang your food. Poles for hanging food are provided in most locations; some campsites have food storage boxes.

What About Bears?

Bears and other wildlife can be seen on the trail. Be aware of their possible presence, watch for tracks and avoid encounters by making noise as you walk. Hang or store in provided boxes all food and any other items with odor. Do not cook in your camp; use the shelters provided for you. Do not feed wildlife, including squirrels and birds as they lose their fear of humans

and become vulnerable to injury from those less kind than you. Hang your pack when you are not wearing it; small rodents love to chew pack straps and find those hidden caches of nuts you are saving for the hike out. Stampedeers often faced hardship when food caches were lost or times became tight. This is one Chilkoot hardship you needn't repeat.

Natural and Cultural Resources

During the gold rush stampedeers abandoned unwanted or unwieldy goods along the trail, killed and ate plants and animals as needed for their survival, and harvested trees for building materials and fire wood. Times have changed. The natural and cultural resources found on the Chilkoot are considered international treasures and are strictly protected as a part of Klondike Gold Rush International Historical Park. Please practice "Leave No Trace" techniques. Leave artifacts in place along the trail. They are part of the memory

of struggles and triumphs, dreams and disasters that bring the past to life. As you struggle up the Golden Stairs, the pieces of the past you see remind you of the struggles of the Tlingit traders for survival and of the stampedeers quest to reach their dreams of riches. Leave those reminders to enhance future trips.

Tidewater to Headwaters

Stampedeers arrived by boat at Dyea on the coast to begin the Chilkoot Trail. They ended their hike at Bennett where they built boats to float on to the Klondike. Unless you want to float all the way to the gold fields, you will want to make arrangements to be transported from Bennett back to Skagway or Dyea. There are a few options including local transportation, railway transport or leaving a car at Log Cabin. Call the reservations number or the Skagway Trail Center for details.

For Further Information:

Parks Canada Reservations:
1-800-661-0486

U.S. National Park Service Trail Center:
907-983-9234 - summer only

www.pc.gc.ca/chilkoot (for Parks Canada)

www.nps.gov/klgo/chilkoot.htm (for U.S. National Park Service)

www.alaskanha.org/bookstore/regional_maps/index3.html (to purchase "Hiker's Guide to the Chilkoot Trail")

www.whitepassrailroad.com (for railroad transportation fees and schedules)

An International Trail



During the gold rush the Northwest Mounted Police staffed border posts and collected customs duties owed on goods entering Canada and kept a list of people crossing the border. The Chilkoot is still an international trail. It is part of the Klondike Gold Rush International Historical Park which has sites in Seattle, Washington, Skagway and Dyea,

Alaska, as well as the Thirty Mile Section of the Yukon River, Dawson City, and the surrounding area. You will be crossing the border at the halfway point on the trail. Hikers are required to carry photo identification, and proof of citizenship and must register at the Skagway Trail Center before embarking upon the trail.

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