

# CHILKOOT TRAIL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

## HIKER PREPARATION GUIDE



Hiking towards Happy Camp

Credit: Christine Aikens

**The information in this guide supplements and updates the information on the accompanying map *A Hiker's Guide to the Chilkoot Trail*. Prior to planning your trip, assess your skills and physical fitness level. Do not over estimate your abilities on this challenging hike.**

The United States and Canada officially recognized the Chilkoot Trail as part of the Klondike Gold Rush International Historical Park in 1998. The trail is cooperatively managed by the United States National Parks Service and Parks Canada.



Parks  
Canada

Parcs  
Canada

## WHAT TO EXPECT



*View from the Chilkoot Pass overlooking Crater Lake*

The Chilkoot Trail is isolated, strenuous, physically challenging and potentially hazardous. The trail is also extremely rewarding, providing hikers with spectacular scenery within a unique historical setting.

The Chilkoot Trail traverses rocky, very steep and sometimes snow covered terrain. The trail can be rough with deep mud, standing water, unstable boulders, slick rocks and roots making footing difficult. The portion of the hike from the Scales over Chilkoot Pass is a route not a trail. While the route is marked, extreme weather conditions can complicate route finding. “Crossing the Pass” is the most demanding day. It often takes 12 hours to travel from Sheep Camp to Happy Camp, a distance of only 12.1 km (7.5 miles). Some hikers are challenged by vertigo or by balancing on unstable slippery snow and rocks, as they carry a heavy pack and body weight up to and down from the Pass. Snowfields between the Scales and Happy Camp persist throughout the summer months. Be prepared to camp on snow at Happy Camp until late June/early July.

Mountain weather is highly unpredictable and can change quickly. Regardless of season, hikers can expect wet, cold, windy and/or white-out conditions; severe rain or snow storms are possible even in the middle of summer. Avalanche hazard persists until mid-July.

## WHO SHOULD HIKE THE TRAIL

The Chilkoot should only be attempted by persons who are physically fit and experienced in hiking and backpacking. It should not be attempted by novice hikers. Individuals who have previously injured their ankles, knees or back, or who have chronic pain frequently experience flare-ups while hiking the Chilkoot. To avoid unnecessary problems test your strength and endurance on shorter, less demanding overnight trips prior to hiking the Chilkoot. Hiking with a partner or small group is preferable.

**Families:** This hike is not recommended for young children. Children tend to speed ahead of their parents and frequently end up coping with hazards on their own. Parents should be particularly observant and watch for the onset of hypothermia in their children as well as in themselves. Practise good leadership and teach your family the importance of low impact camping.

**Custodial Groups:** A “custodial group” means a group affiliated with an institution, where at least one person is a minor and not in the company of his/her parent. Guidelines specific to custodial groups hiking the Chilkoot Trail will be provided by Parks Canada.

**Pets:** We recommend you do not take your pets on the trail; however, if you choose to do so pets must be kept on a leash **at all times**.

## HIKING SEASON

Parks Canada and United States National Parks Service staff patrols the trail from early June, when the route over Chilkoot Pass is first marked, until early September. USNPS Rangers are stationed at Sheep Camp and Parks Canada staff are stationed at Lindeman City and Chilkoot Pass. This however does not guarantee that someone will be at these locations at all times should you require assistance.

### When to hike

**Early June:** Winter like conditions persist. Travel may be very difficult. Avalanche hazard exists. During this time you will want to cross Chilkoot Pass early in the day to reduce your exposure in avalanche terrain. There will be few other hikers on the trail. Check with the Trail Center for seasonal conditions.

**Mid-June - early July:** Early season backpacking: significant amounts of snow, variable travel conditions. Avalanche hazard persists until mid-July. During this time you will want to cross Chilkoot Pass early in the day to reduce your exposure in avalanche terrain.

**Mid-July - mid-August:** Peak Season: Trail is generally snow free though some snow patches persist. Travel conditions are highly variable and dependant on weather. Peak visitor use occurs during this period.

**Mid-August - late September:** Fall Backpacking: Trail is generally snow free though some snow patches still persist. Weather is wetter; daylight hours are shorter, nights are colder (often below freezing). The route over Chilkoot Pass is not marked after patrol staff leaves the trail in early September.

## HIKING TRIP LOGISTICS

*Plan time to relax and enjoy this historical setting as well as to deal with unforeseen difficulties and delays. Allow ample time before and after your hike to avoid unnecessary conflicts with other travel arrangements.*

**Most backpackers spend between three and five nights on the Trail.** Almost all begin their trek in Dyea and hike north towards Bennett. This option retraces the journey of the stampedeers en route to the Klondike goldfields and as most weather systems blow in from the coast, driving rain or heavy winds will tend to be at your back. It is desirable, especially in the early season when avalanche hazard is a concern, to stay in Sheep Camp the night before crossing Chilkoot Pass.

Hiking north to south you will be moving against the predominant flow of hikers and will encounter many more hikers along the Trail. Descending the steep incline from the Pass to the Scales, while easier on the respiratory system, places greater stress on knee and ankle joints and puts you at greater risk of losing your footing, falling and possibly injuring yourself.



*Descending the Pass*

## ACCESS

The Chilkoot Trail is accessed from the town of Skagway, Alaska. Skagway is accessible by road from Whitehorse, Yukon, via the South Klondike Highway. During the summer visitor season, there is a bus service between Whitehorse and Skagway. Vehicle rentals are also available in Whitehorse. There is both ferry and commuter air service to Skagway from Juneau, Alaska.

### Dyea Trailhead

The Dyea trailhead is a distance of 16 km / 10 miles from Skagway. Access is by all weather dirt road. Overnight parking is available in Dyea at the National Parks Service campground located 1 km / ½ mile from the trailhead. There are a number of private shuttles that provide transport from Skagway to the trailhead at Dyea. Contact information for these services is available at the Trail Centre.

### Bennett Trailhead

There is a primitive campground at Bennett, but there are no other tourist services. **There is no road access to Bennett.** Your exit options are train, or for those returning to Whitehorse, floatplane. There is no phone or cell phone service at Bennett. **All post-hike travel arrangements must be made prior to starting the trail.** Contact carriers directly:

#### Train:

**White Pass & Yukon Route**  
[www.wpyr.com](http://www.wpyr.com) - 1-800-343-7373

#### Float Planes:

**Alpine Aviation** 867-668-7725  
[www.alpineaviationyukon.com](http://www.alpineaviationyukon.com)

**Amber Airways** 867 334-3535  
[www.amberairways.com](http://www.amberairways.com)

**Black Sheep Aviation** 867 668-7761  
[www.flyblacksheep.ca](http://www.flyblacksheep.ca)

**Tintina Air** 867 332-8468  
[www.tintinaair.com](http://www.tintinaair.com)

## BORDER CROSSING INFORMATION

The Chilkoot Trail crosses the international boundary between the United States and Canada. Full compliance with the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative went into effect June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 and requires U.S. and Canadian citizens to present one of the following documents for entry into the United States by land or sea from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, or Bermuda.

**US/Canadian Citizens:** US Passport Card, Enhanced Driver's License, US or Canadian passport, or a Trusted Traveler Program card issued by US Customs and Border Protection.

**Landed Immigrants:** Passport from their native country with U.S. Visa, if required.

**Resident Aliens:** Permanent Resident Card

**Other Nationalities:** Passport (and Canadian and/or U.S. Visas, if required)

**Children:** US and Canadian citizens under the age of 16, or under the age of 19 if traveling with a school, religious, or other youth group, may present a birth certificate, Consular Report of Birth Abroad, Canadian Citizenship Card, or a naturalization certificate. Birth certificates can be an original, photocopy, or certified copy.

**if accompanied by both parents:** birth certificate

**if accompanied by one parent:** birth certificate *and* notarized letter of authorization from absent parent

**if neither parent is present:** birth certificate *and* letter of authorization from parent/legal guardian

## Northbound Hikers

All hikers traveling from the US into Canada must register at the Trail Center prior to starting their hike. All hikers must be present and have proper documentation for crossing the border. **Fall hikers** can register at the National Park Service Visitor Centre in Skagway (on Broadway between 1st and 2nd Avenues).

All persons utilizing the Chilkoot Trail to enter Canada must report in person, unless otherwise specified, to the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) immediately upon completion of their hike. The following options are available for reporting:

### Fraser port of entry

Km 36.5 - South Klondike Highway  
Fraser, British Columbia

### Whitehorse inland office

Suite 110 - 300 Main Street  
Whitehorse, Yukon

### **Outside hours of operation:**

1-867-821-4111

## Southbound Hikers

Canadian and US citizens, and US resident aliens hiking from Canada into the US can register with Parks Canada in Whitehorse (Suite 205-300 Main). These hikers must report to US Customs and Border Protection at the Skagway Port of Entry (mile 6.8 on the South Klondike Highway) after completing their hike.

All others must register directly with US Customs and Border Protection at the Skagway Port of Entry (mile 6.8 on the South Klondike Highway) **prior to commencing their hike**. When registering, all party members must be present and have appropriate identification/documentation with them.

### **Questions**

#### Canada Border Services Agency

Whitehorse: 867-667-3943 [www.asfc.gc.ca](http://www.asfc.gc.ca)

#### US Customs and Border Protection

Skagway Port of Entry: 907-983-3144 or  
907-983-2325 [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov)

## PARK MANAGEMENT

### **Quota**

In order to maintain a high quality hiking experience and to minimize the impact of hikers on Park resources, **a maximum of 50 hikers per day will be Permitted to enter Canada over Chilkoot Pass.**

### **Group Size**

Large groups tend to have a negative effect upon the experience of other hikers, as well as placing greater demands upon park facilities and greater stress on the park environment.

In order to minimize the impacts of large groups, **group size is limited to a maximum of 12; only one large group (9 – 12 people) is permitted to cross Chilkoot Pass on any given day.**

Please show consideration for your fellow hikers and the park environment by respecting these limitations. **Use of multiple bookings to circumvent group size restrictions is unacceptable and may result in loss of Permits.**

### **Permit Conditions**

1. Do not remove or disturb any natural or cultural resources.
2. Do not disturb, feed or entice wildlife.
3. Do not leave packs unattended. Use food/garbage storage devices.
4. Do not pollute. Pack out all garbage/food waste. Use grey water pits where provided
5. Cook and eat only in designated areas. No food at tent sites.
6. Camp only in designated campsites (no camping in shelters).
7. No campfires.
8. Pets must be on a leash at all times.
9. Fishing is restricted
10. Metal Detectors, firearms and mountain bikes are restricted.
11. Maximum group is 12.
12. A business license is required for guided groups.

## Designated Camping

**Camping is allowed in designated campgrounds only.** Individual campsites within the campgrounds are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. **Open fires are prohibited.**

## Permits and Fees



**Every person overnighiting on the Chilkoot Trail, and day users on the Canadian portion of the Chilkoot Trail, require a Permit.** Day users remaining on the US portion of the trail do not require a Permit. Those without required permits are subject to fines.

Permit fees are collected to help offset the cost of the trail, facilities maintenance and information services.

## Reservations

Forty-two Reservations (to enter Canada over Chilkoot Pass) will be taken for each day, leaving eight Permits for Walk-ins. **Reservations for the upcoming hiking season will start being accepted in early January.** Reservations for large groups (9 to 12 people maximum) are accepted as of September 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

At the time of reservation **you must specify which campgrounds you will stay at for each night of your trip.** While this requires careful pre-trip planning, it eliminates overcrowding in campgrounds and ensures that everyone will have a place to camp. **Choose your campgrounds with the least experienced member of your group in mind!!!** If you are taking the train, make sure

your exit day corresponds with the train schedule.

**Please have your desired hiking itinerary (and an alternative itinerary) ready and your credit card handy when you phone to make your Reservation.** You may reserve Monday to Friday from 8 am to 4 pm (Pacific Time) by calling Parks Canada at:

**1-800-661-0486** Canada & U.S.  
1-867-667-3910 local & overseas

**All fees are payable at time of reservation. Permit fees are refundable up to one calendar month prior to start date. Reservation fees are non-refundable.**

You must pick up your reserved Permits and register for Customs at The Trail Center in Skagway, located on 520 Broadway. Permits can be picked up the day before, or on the day that you begin your hike. **All hikers must be present and have proper documentation for crossing the border.**

### Mandatory Orientations

Trail orientations are mandatory and are scheduled at **8 am, 10 am, noon, 2 pm and 4 pm** (Alaska Time) every day. Please allow approximately 30 minutes for an orientation. **All hikers must attend.**

An optional 13 minute bear safety video will be shown before and after orientations and throughout the day.

We encourage drop-ins for Permits and Customs registration (about 15 minutes) to avoid line-ups before and after orientations.



## Walk-In Permits

Eight Permits to enter Canada over Chilkoot Pass are held for Walk-ins each day. Walk-in permits are issued on a first-come first-serve basis at the Trail Center the day before or on the day that you wish to start your hike.

Parks Canada cannot guarantee availability of Walk-in Permits though delays of more than a day are generally uncommon.

Payment is by debit or credit card only.

## ON THE TRAIL



*Take your time...enjoy your experience. Problems often occur when hikers are ill prepared, rushing, not paying attention to terrain or conditions or when pushing on in the dark. Ensure that you have a realistic hiking itinerary, that you are properly equipped, take adequate rest breaks and watch for signs of exhaustion and hypothermia amongst your party members. Be prepared to turn back if you encounter extreme weather or members of your group have problems.*

## Water Availability

Surface water is the only source of drinking water on the Chilkoot Trail. While water is available along most sections of the trail/route, it is a good idea to travel with a full water bottle as there are dry stretches. There are places to get water at all campgrounds. Purify all drinking water.

## Waste Water Disposal

Never wash clothes, dishes or yourself directly in a water source. Waste water is disposed of differently in the U.S. and Canadian sides of the trail.

**On the U.S. side:** Toss water into the fastest flowing part of the river.

**On the Canadian side:** Use wastewater disposal pits, located in all campgrounds and at Chilkoot Pass. Be sure to clean food waste off the screen and pack it out with your garbage.



## Pack In – Pack out

You must pack out everything that you pack into the park. Keep your meals simple and light – this will cut down on the weight you carry in and the garbage that you will have to carry out. Nothing should be discarded in the park, including food scraps, wet garbage, grease and cigarette butts.

## Human Waste

Outhouses are located in every campground and at Chilkoot Pass. **Toilet paper is not supplied on the Canadian side of the trail,** and supplies on the U.S side are limited. It is best to bring your own.

## Equipment

Your main goal on the Chilkoot will be to stay warm and dry. Use equipment and clothing designed for cold, wet conditions; aim for quality, lightweight equipment. Synthetic or wool clothing is best. Have the capability to quickly prepare hot meals and drinks. Pack everything in plastic bags to keep it dry.

**Think of your Feet** - Do not break in new boots on this hike. Be able to treat blisters adequately; apply moleskin to blister prone areas **before** starting to hike.

**Walking Sticks** – Trekking poles can be **helpful**, especially when crossing **snowfields, creeks** and **rocky areas**. The increased use of walking sticks has added to the erosion problems on the trail. Use your trekking poles where you need them to ensure safety but please avoid using them on the exposed trail.

### **Do I need avalanche equipment in the early hiking season?**

When traveling in avalanche terrain during the winter it is standard protocol to carry an avalanche transceiver, probe and shovel. From June 1 to mid-July, Chilkoot Trail users are exposed to a relatively low avalanche hazard. Traveling early and not stopping in avalanche paths are sufficient mitigations of this risk. Therefore, Parks Canada does not formally advise each hiker to carry personal avalanche rescue gear in the summer hiking season.

Your pack should fit well and weigh no more than 30% of your body weight. Reassess your pack contents if your pack is too heavy. Be realistic – every ounce counts.

### **Equipment options for early June:**

Some hikers find winter travel equipment beneficial in early June. You will have to balance the benefits of easier travel on the snow with the disadvantage of the weight of this equipment. Check with the Trail Center for up-to-date early-season travel conditions (907-983-9234).

You may find the following checklist helpful in planning a summer hike of the Chilkoot:

#### **Core Items:**

- Backpack and waterproof pack cover
- Lightweight tent with rain fly and groundsheet
- Sleeping bag & insulating sleeping pad
- Stove, fuel, cookset and matches
- Water bottle and purification kit
- Food for trip, plus an extra day's supply of food and fuel
- Litter bag
- Bear Spray
- Map
- Toilet paper
- Border Crossing required documentation

#### **Clothing:**

- Sturdy, comfortable, well broken-in hiking boots
- Rain jacket and pants
- Gaiters
- Windbreaker
- Insulating layers (wool and synthetics are best)
- Extra change of clothes and socks
- Wool hat and mittens
- Sun hat, sun glasses and sunscreen
- Shorts
- Lightweight shoes for around camp

#### **Other:**

- Insect repellent; Repair kit for equipment
- Pocket knife
- Flashlight (August)
- First aid and blister kits
- Whistle for emergencies
- Fine rope to secure your tent to tent platforms)
- 9 m (30') of sturdy cord (to hang food at Pleasant Camp)

#### **Options for early June:**

- Winter travel equipment: Skis/snowshoes
- Ice axe/crampons



## INJURIES AND EVACUATIONS



Park staff are responsible for patrolling the Chilkoot Trail and will assist injured hikers. Between one and five helicopter- assisted evacuations occur each year. If you have an accident while hiking on the Chilkoot Trail, you may be expected to pay for search and rescue and /or medical services, which can run in excess of \$2,000. **Make sure you have adequate insurance coverage.**

**Slips, trips and falls** occur due to a variety of reasons. If you are not seriously injured and are near the Trailhead, then attempt to get off the trail with the assistance of your party or other hikers. Do not continue on in the hopes that your condition will improve. **If you have knee or ankle injuries at Sheep Camp, you are encouraged to turn back, as the climb to the Pass is extremely challenging and will aggravate your injury.**

**If you are seriously injured** and unable to continue hiking, get another hiker to assist you in getting a message to the nearest Park staff. Give the name, exact location, time and description of the accident and related injuries, whether first aid is being administered and if possible, any related medical problems. **Injured hikers should not be abandoned to wait for assistance on their own!**

## HIKING & CAMPING IN BEAR COUNTRY



The Chilkoot Trail is located in an area home to both black and grizzly bears. Bears have an acute sense of smell and are attracted to human food, garbage, and other items with strong odours. Bears who obtain human food/garbage quickly develop a taste for it, and can become increasingly persistent in their attempts to obtain more.

You can help promote the harmonious co-existence of bears and hikers on the Chilkoot by ensuring that you are not presenting bears with opportunities to get a hold of food and garbage. During the day when on the trail, **always keep your backpacks within arms reach. Immediately upon arrival in camp, securely stow all food and other attractants.** Bear food-storage caches are provided at each campground except at Pleasant Camp where a Bear pole is still in use. You need to bring your own rope (9 m / 30') for use with the Bear pole.



**Prepare food and eat only at shelters or near food storage areas; not at tent sites.**

Avoid smelly foods (use dried or pre-packaged food instead). Plan meals carefully to reduce leftovers.

Store all food leftovers/garbage, dishes/pots/utensils, stove, fuel and toiletries with food.

Familiarize yourself with the principles and practices of safe travel in bear country. Read the “[You Are in Bear Country](#)” brochure and see the Bear Safety video in Skagway before starting your hike.



Hikers are asked to report all bear sightings to Park staff. **Bear activity can result in area closures and /or travel restrictions.**

You may carry Bear spray on the Chilkoot Trail as long as it is clearly labelled for use on animals and the package weight/volume does not exceed 500 gr/500 ml. Any product intended for protection against people (mace, tear gas, etc.) is not legal in Canada. Be advised that it is not permissible to carry bear spray on a commercial airline, even in your checked baggage.

## CULTURAL RESOURCES



*St-Andrew's Church at Bennett*

*Over this trail, thousands of goldseekers trekked en route to the Klondike goldfields irrevocably establishing a non-native presence in the territory. Prior to, as well as during the Gold Rush, this route was also an important trade and travel link for First Nations.*

Modification of the landscape by the stampedeers is an irreplaceable record of Gold Rush activity on the Chilkoot Trail.

Stone tent platforms, rock quays at the shores of a lake, the routing choices of the trail, and other cultural landscape features are not always obvious, but speak of the lives of the stampedeers and can serve to trigger the imagination as to what life was like for those who came over Chilkoot Pass.

An apparent jumble of rocks observed from one angle may upon closer inspection reveal itself to be the foundation of a hotel; tampering with these features will destroy the story of their past.

**Please do not move rocks; they tell a story.** Please respect the artifacts and the cultural landscape; your stewardship of the Chilkoot Trail will benefit all. **Destroying, damaging, collecting or removing natural or cultural resources is an offence under the National Historic Park Regulations.**