

## **MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH – SPECIAL EDITION – DEC. 31, 2003**

### **The Chilkoot Trail**

Prepared and submitted by Henry Breaden [breaden@shaw.ca](mailto:breaden@shaw.ca)

You will find 72 photographs in 3 Webshot albums of 24 each at appropriate spots. Likely it will open with the first 15 photos, and below the number 15 click on 'next' to view the next 9 photos. Click 'on the photo' to enlarge it, and above that you will see where you will see two holes, "Normal" and "Fit to Window". Click 'Fit to window' to view full screen, and to return to main page click the 'Back' green arrow, top left. I hope you enjoy your hike over the Chilkoot Pass.

In 1976, Alice made the climb of the Chilkoot with our son, Roy, her friend Arla Repka and her daughter, Cheri. Upon her arrival by train back in Whitehorse she was so enthused that she told me I just had to make the trip. To this day she claims that she blazed the trail for me. So during the next year we started making plans and getting proper equipment together. Proper boots must be broken in so that you do not have sore feet, and clothes that are warm but that still lets your body breathe are best. For headgear, a touque was found to be ideal for it allowed your head to breathe, and layered clothing allowed you to add or subtract depending on weather. Nylon was found to be a no-no, for it held in moisture and you became soaking wet from sweat. A hip belt took the weight of your pack rather than it hanging on your shoulders where they got sore at the end of a day. A water canister quenched your thirst while hiking, and how about when you looked at that big hill ahead and thought you just could not make it? Early that year we found from a German lady hiker that "Dextrosol", a glucose candy that was available at the drug store candy counter, for 75¢ a package of 12. When your muscles were screaming and you look at that hill ahead, just chew one of the tablets slowly and before you know it the hurting is gone and you are over the top, ready for the next one. The Dextrosol was quick energy and warmed your body so that your pack felt like it should be there. Another help was a trail mix of hard candy and nuts if you like them, and can be put together prior and in your pack for your hike. Those outside pockets on the pack could carry a lot of goodies! And tied to your pack frame was your ever-present drinking cup. Water on the trail is crystal clear and cold without chlorine and it tastes like it should.

How about cooking and supplies? We had a small gas hiking stove that had with it pots and a small frying pan, but we carried with us a couple of light weight pots. A quart of white gas served us while cooking for the four of us. Also a small methyl hydrate burner that would keep other things warm while you cooked. We carried freeze dried steaks, chops, chilli, stew, noodles, and freeze dried omelets, which the kids swore off the first morning and I the second! They were terrible and even worse than powdered eggs! The next year, the kids and I had a can of Danish bacon, and we each carried ½ dozen fresh eggs. (Did not crack one in the pack!) Rather than have bacon and eggs, Alice survived on granola with powered milk in a Zip Lock to which she added water. Another was ¼ pound packs of dried noodles with flavouring that we used for lunch. To the top of our packs we lashed two packages of Rusk each, which is toasted bread and did not get stale. Good thing too, for two guides from Skagway with their two hikers ran out of food. We had enough to do us for an extra 5 days and were able to help them out.

We found that these foil packs of ketchup and mustard in the pack spiced up things like the noodles and other dishes. I somehow attained the distinction of becoming “Chief Cook” on the trail. Fresh water was available except over the pass itself, and this is where we used our canisters. So I think that we were near ready to hit the trail!

An important thing was a hiking stick about four feet long. In the course of the hike you would find that you used it constantly to boost yourself while climbing, or to stabilize yourself while on a decline. Along the way it was constantly in your hand like an old friend. And very important too is a flask of rum and brandy in the adult packs of course for medicinal purposes! We can assure you too, that it improves the coffee especially on a cold morning when you find many creaks and groans in the old bones trying to get them started.

You need tents, so we took two, two-man tents and extra flies in case of heavy rain. Hiker’s sleeping bags down filled that were only about three pounds. And foamies for sleeping on, but no matter what, you still had a root or branch or something underneath there that you had to live with for the night. Plenty of socks so that you always had clean socks to start the day, and under clothing so that if you got wet you had something dry to put on. If you were getting short on socks, you could always wash some and hang them on the outside of your pack to dry. The main thing was to keep your feet clean and dry. Good idea to pack good First Aid Supplies for if you should ever need them. And a pack of Dr. Scholl’s moleskin if you felt any part of your feet with a blister developing. If you felt a spot heating up, stop and apply a piece to the area and your troubles were over.

You are not allowed to carry firearms, but a good idea to carry a flare gun. You can summon help if needed, and as a last resort if a bear charges you it is going to take guts but better than being mauled. Another item is a set of bear bells hung on your pack, for if a bear knows you are in the country they usually want nothing to do with you. Likely on the trail a bear may be back in the trees watching you go by, but as long as he knows that you are there and you do not surprise him you have no trouble. If you are quiet you could come across a bear and surprise him or her. They feel threatened and may possibly charge. To my knowledge I have not heard of any instance where a hiker has been molested on the Chilkoot. And the last is a lot of good common sense on the trail and enjoy yourself. Remember to pack in and pack out, and to leave no garbage behind you. Keep a clean camp and you will most likely have no trouble with bears. At the cabins are fire pits where any burnables may be burned, and pack out the rest!

For the many who have made the Chilkoot Trail hike it will bring back fond memories of their hike over the pass. For others who have not had the opportunity to make it, grab your pack and join us on this fantastic adventure. Just be ready to climb a couple of good-sized hills, and be prepared for some aching muscles until you get in shape. And whatever you do, don’t forget your camera, the first year I took 144 photos. That year we had the mist down fairly low and I was not happy with some of them, as they did not show enough detail. So it was, “Oh yes, we have to go back again,” and I have about 200 photos in total after our next trip the next year. At Bennett on the way down for the second trip, we spoke with packers off the trail and it was raining something awful. Many of them had wet packs and were soaking wet themselves. Alice asked me what I thought, and I commented that we were committed. We were well equipped for any

type of weather so we would do OK. But as it turned out, it was beautiful weather the whole trail length. On our first trip as a family we took five days as I was photographing and looking for history. But on the second trip we easily made it and enjoyed about 4 ¼ days.

Album No. 1

The first 24 photos click on: <http://community.webshots.com/album/105373106wGFvNN?962>

Leaving on the White Pass Railway in the morning we enjoyed our first leg to Bennett and for lunch had traditional Beef Stew, Apple Pie and Coffee. This was traditional lunch, and I don't know how they made it always taste so good. Travelling to Vancouver by White Pass and the CPR coast steamers, we used to kid around that going down you had Beef Stew and Apple Pie. On the way back you had Apple Pie and Beef Stew. On the way to Skagway if you looked across a small rocky valley you could still see the old White Pass trail of 98. (Photo 1) Even after that length of time the old trail was imbedded in the sidehill. There are many scenic areas to be seen on this portion of the railway trip. On our first trip it was onwards to Skagway where we had a meal before our first climb. Alice knew of a camping spot 1.5 miles up the mountain, and I fresh from an office chair swore that it was 15 miles. We set up our two man tents and after a good nights sleep packed up and headed down again. The trip down to Skagway was much faster where we had breakfast and arrangements for a taxi to the trail head. Here we were dropped off with a "Have a nice trip!" (photo 2) Did you ever get a lonesome feeling? Through that hole in the bush was Bennett, and it was only 33 miles! As it was raining we fitted up with wet gear and were ready for the trail. (photo 3) On the second trip they had a campground right in Skagway where we stayed overnight which eliminated that hike up the mountain to camp.

We visited the cemetery at Dyea, the trail head where near 70 people were buried from an avalanche below the pass on Palm Sunday in 1898. After that first dense wet bush we were under the trees and quite pleasant, but within a short period here was our first climb up a steep hill and I found I was not in shape. It was only 7 miles of uphill, downhill, across rivers and streams (photo 4) and more hills to the Canyon Shelter, which felt like 70 miles. I neglected to mention the old logging road that we hiked which parts were flooded. (photo 5) I had a 54-pound pack, Alice 45, Roy 35 and Lura 14 pounds. The first year Roy was 13 years and Lura 9. The next year we cut out all those unnecessary things, did I really need that camera tripod? No either put it on a stump or tie it to a tree. Many unnecessary things were left at home, and I had 45 pounds, Alice 38, Roy 32 and Lura 12 pounds. That year we were laughing all the way! So we arrived at Canyon Shelter (photo 6) where you could sleep in a bunk if you were early, and on the floor if later. We cooked our evening meal and after considerable chat bedded down with many other hikers on the floor? During the night the mice ran over you, and maybe just as well if you slept with your mouth closed! At each cabin it was real humorous, for a hiker would feel they did not need something and it was too heavy so they would leave it behind. As they say, one persons' junk is another person's treasure. Those items travelled up and down the trail in different packs according to necessity.

In the morning of our second trip I proceeded to cook breakfast of fresh canned bacon and eggs on Rusk. (You should have heard the stories up and down the trail of that fellow that was carrying fresh T Bone steaks and who knows what in his pack!) We hit the trail to Canyon City, which was 1.2 miles. Taking a side trip we crossed the Taiya River over a suspension bridge.

(photo 7) Here we found the remnants of the old tramline that during the rush ran all the way up over the Chilkoot Pass. We saw the boiler that had powered the tramline, (photo 8) and a plaque showing a view of it in operation. (photo 9) Also a huge cook stove that must have cooked many their meal! (photo 10) The area was badly grown over, but between the bush you would find some old pieces that had been in use. The main thing was to look and enjoy, photograph and leave it in place for someone else to find.

So we had a fresh morning and onward to Sheep Camp, back across the bridge and on the trail again. Not too far you come to another good hill (11) where someone has graciously put in some poplar handrails to boost yourself. At the top of that hill we stopped long enough for a break and a bit of sprucing up like putting on lipstick! The trail in some soggy parts had poles laid (12) lengthways, and at others fairly dry going. Along the way you would see Devil's Club, which was colourful to view, but stay away from it, and a glacier (13) to your left. Then we came to the Donut Tree (14) which was an evergreen that was growing upright and for some reason made a complete circle and upwards again. I have often wondered how many hikers missed that tree. Some more creek crossings (15) and at one point a fire pit of rocks (16) that someone had made to safely use a fire for cooking. At one point you could see the upper canyon far below, (17) and an old telephone pole still standing with a crossarm and insulators sitting at the base. (18) There was communication from Canyon City to the top of the pass along with the tramway. The trail proceeded sometimes along the hillside, sometimes through heavy growth and often in the open.

And at last after 6 miles from the Canyon Shelter we arrived at Sheep Camp Shelter. (19) (20) Similar to Canyon, you could put up your tents or sleep on the floor, so after cooking our evening meal and after a lot of chin wag about what was taking place up and down the trail we were ready to call it a day. As hikers were hiking both directions, you had all the news of what to expect ahead.

A new day with bacon and eggs, and others savouring the smell but surviving on their trail mix. From Sheep Camp if you looked towards Irene Glacier (21) and it was clear, you were assured of a good day in the pass. This morning it was clear and we were off again. As we were higher in elevation, we left the coastal growth behind us and into more bare rock and snowfields. (22) to (26)

Album No. 2

Photos 25-48 <http://community.webshots.com/album/105374961hIUKfx?291>

Each night we made sure that our hiking boots were greased with snow seal to make them waterproof. We did see hikers going down with runners, and their feet must have been in terrible shape by the time they hit Skagway. Those old "Shank's Mare" were important to be kept clean and dry. On the hill to the left you could still see some remaining towers from the old tramway. The view, although barren, has a beauty all of its own and you soon realised how important this was. We were hiking either rock or snow fields, which was good going and arrived below the official scales for lunch. I put on our special of noodles and coffee for lunch, and we found that a ¼ pound pack would nicely feed two people. We had Rusk with the noodles to round out our meal. We found that mid day you did not want to over eat so that you become lazy! We were camped beside a crystal clear pool of water on a large flat rock for our lunch. (27)

So, “On Packs” and hit the trail up to the official plaque (28) where for the first time you could see your “Obstacle”, the Chilkoot Pass. (29) The Chilkoot was on the left, and Peterson Pass on the right. I understand that Peterson was an easier slope but a far longer way around. Nobody seemed interested in Peterson at all, for we were here to hike the Chilkoot. To the right was the wreckage across the valley of a small aircraft that had gone down, but never heard the story on it. (30) From that point the trail dropped gradually to the valley floor, although you hardly noticed as you now were in shape. You were so used to climbing that when you hit a level spot, it felt like going downhill. Across the snowfield and you arrive at the base of the Golden Stairway. (31) Rocks are all different sizes, and you soon learn to either go around them if they are too big or over the top. To the top of the first lift the rock is coarse and you pick your way up while climbing. Using both your hands and feet and make sure of solid footing. Once in a while you take a break to gaze back down the pass and across that barren valley. (32) And up the stairs (33) where it is tough climbing (34) to the top of the first lift (35) From there, there is a snowfield up to the second lift where you will see an old winch (36) that has rusted but not pitted in the 78 years it has been up there. From this snowfield you can see the boundary marker between Alaska and British Columbia. (37) So on to the second lift, which is child’s play after the first one. (38) At the top is a gradual ascent on a snowfield (39) to the Summit Marker. So you have made the Chilkoot without any scrapes or breaks and feel like you are at the top of the world. (40)

You are now on a descending snowfield with that ever-present mist above you and to your left is Crater Lake far below. (41)(42) You are hiking a side hill of hard snow pack, and as the mist descends you rope up the kids with your 50 foot rope so that should they slip they would not be in for a swim. You encounter the tramline anchor, which they call the stone crib (43), which was cribbed of what appears 4” x 6” sawed lumber. When you think of it, all that material had to be packed up the Golden Stairway along with the material for the towers. Along with that, all of that rock had to be carried to fill the crib at the stone crib, tons and tons of it. It is hard to imagine the great determination of those folks in their thoughts of, “Reaching the Klondyke where you could pick up gold nuggets just for the reaching!” As I understand, the tramway ran until later 1899 after the White Pass Railway reached Lake Bennett on July 6<sup>th</sup> 1899. As the tramway fell into disuse, parts of it were dismantled and taken out. I would say that the wise ones were the ones that provided services along the trail, which enable them later to become proprietors of businesses in Dawson City.

Shortly below the crib is Stonehouse, which is two huge rocks, one so help me as big as a house, and the other not much smaller. These rocks likely were dumped there at the end of the last ice age. After leaving Stonehouse, the trail (44) follows a snowfield gradually down to a level area that was once known as the Tenting Area. (45) At the time of our hike you could still see some of the lower frames in the ground. Something that strikes your eye on that upper snowfield is the patches of pink. Even further on you will see this colour in some of the snowfields. As the rock of the area has a red or rusty tinge, any dust carried onto the snowfields causes this colouration. As you look around you will see many snowfields even though it is August. The barren country has its own beauty that will stay with you for a lifetime and you will never forget the Chilkoot Pass.

From the tenting area you hike across snowfields. Some areas where the snow has melted and the trail is worn on a hillside. On the edge of the snowmelt it is common to see miniature flowers blooming for the overhanging snow like a shell creates a greenhouse all of its own.

Following the trail along a hillside you come to a canyon where the water from Crater Lake flows through. Broken rock is sloped from the canyon wall right to the flowing water, so you pick your way with caution but it is not bad. (46) When you are about half way through the canyon you will see a pillar of rock to the right, (47) and it makes you wonder how it could have survived so many years of weather.

After passing through the full canyon you start to climb, but this is easy after the Chilkoot. It is beautiful country and will last for a lifetime in your memory. That water flows into the upper end of Long Lake. (48) There is a plaque along side of the trail with a photo and an explanation of what you are seeing and the different mountain peaks around you. From here you still see some snowfields and the trail is up and down and along side hills till you reach the lower end of Long Lake. (49)

Album No 3:

Photos 49-72 <http://community.webshots.com/album/105376863nypvLV?601>

From the high ground you can now see the last of the lake chain, Deep Lake. (50) We encountered three hikers who were going to overnight up on the hillside where there was a nice level area to put up their tents. We chatted with them, and as a cold wind was blowing explained that I was going to go around the hill out of the wind and cook our evening meal. He asked what I was going to cook and I explained, "Oh I think we will have some beef steaks." After hearing those wild stories along the trail he said, "Not real ones surely?" I had to confess that they were freeze dried, and that they did not take that long to prepare. Something what went well on the trail too was dried potatoes and vegetables. Just soak them to re-hydrate them and put them on the cooker. Coffee was usually the first thing on, and kept us going till the rest was cooked. After eating we crossed the valley and over a bridge to a nice camp spot at the upper end of Deep Lake. I have heard on the Internet that they are considering changing the name, as the lake is not all that deep. But in my estimation, I would say why fool around with a name steeped in history? Leave it as it always has been. So after setting up our tents we were away for the night.

In the morning after breakfast and packing our gear we were on the trail again. The trail followed along the left side of Deep Lake, and as we were dropping in elevation you could see the odd hardy tree. At the bottom of Deep Lake is a steel frame for a canvas boat about 16 feet in length, (51) and a set of runners from a horse sleigh. All along the trail are remnants of clothing and boots, some of them those high button lady's boots of the day. My goodness, it is a wonder that they did not freeze their feet in those leather boots. But maybe that is why they are left behind as they became too cold and were discarded. The same applied to men's boots of leather; they must have been Cheechako's to wear anything like that in the winter. The leather drew cold, and the only footwear was either rubber, which was flexible, or something like moccasins. Felt shoes were common for the day, but were very slippery especially on snow and ice. But back to the trail, we were at the foot of Deep Lake and the outflow was like a good-sized creek. (52) This flow was from Deep Lake, and the outflow was at Lindeman Lake. The trail was slightly

downhill and followed the creek near all the way down. On our first trip our young one was getting tired having hiked from Happy Camp and was looking forward to Lindeman. Alice told her that the cabin was just ahead, and sure enough it was, but a miniature cabin set on a post. (53) We all had a good chuckle at that one, and after taking a photo we were on the trail again. It was not all that far that we came to the outflow of the creek into Lindeman Lake. (54)

After crossing the creek made camp at one of the cabins. (55) The setting was beautiful right on the lake shore and on our first trip we were to spend the next two days researching the area where so many stampeders whipsawed lumber for their boats. Where at the time the trees were all cut down for boats, the growth height would be about twenty-five feet after 78 years.

Where is the best place to search for history but the town dump. We were able to find the old Eagle brand sweet milk tins with the pop out lids. This was used in tea or coffee and sugar was not required to sweeten. Likely they were keeping their sugar for the rest of the trip. Others were the large Corned Beef tins, better known as Bully Beef. Remember when lamp gas and kerosene were stored in a 5 gallon American, or 4 gallon Canadian square can? Yes, there were many there with the little valve built in for filling lamps. Many round cans but as the labels were long gone it was hard to tell what they might have contained. Any fabric that was discarded would have deteriorated, but those old button shoes showed up again. From what we could see, there must have been quite a few women, and who else would be doing the cooking while their men whipsawed lumber for their boats? By scouting you could find many items left behind, and we were very careful to look but to leave things in place for history. By our second trip they were mapping the area on a ten-foot grid and mapping items within that grid. I do hope that things were left in place for future historians to find.

On the shore of the lake we found a rear bob for a horse sleigh (56) which might have been used to transport a finished boat to the lake. At the time the ice moved out they likely forgot about the sleigh as they were on their way to the Klondyke. You will notice that I have used the old spelling of Klondyke as I am trying to follow the history of the Yukon.

Further scouting we found an old cabin, (57) and I understand that it was built by a trapper about 1901. If you notice the corners are dovetailed showing the work of an expert craftsman, and in this day and age it is doubtful you could find such skills.

On further scouting we found a whipsawed stick which appeared to have been about a 2" x 4". (58) The remainder and slabs were as if petrified and near hard as stone. It could have been the trapper that whipsawed that stick, but it had been there for a long time.

We had a look at the old cemetery and took time to honour all those old souls who did not make it. (59)

And a plaque with Robert Service's poem:

#### **This is the Law of the Yukon**

This is the Law of the Yukon, that only the Strong shall thrive;  
That surely the Weak shall perish, and only the Fit survive.  
Dissolute, dammed and despairful, crippled and palsied and slain,

This is the will of the Yukon, - Low how she makes it plain!

It seemed so appropriate being that these poor devils did not make it.

On our second trip, as we had scouted the upper end of the lake a year earlier, we headed down to the foot of the lake. I was in hydro and I had a key to the Water Survey Level Station. After taking and recording the levels for that date, I would phone them in at Whitehorse. It made an ideal place to store our packs for there is a cardinal rule regarding bears. Maintain a clean campsite not leaving any garbage or food around to entice the bears. So our packs and food were secure there over night.

We set up our camp and proceeded to enjoy the sandy beach. You would think it was Hawaii (60) with the beautiful blue water and sandy beach, (61) but don't kid yourself, that water was as cold as ice. We had been following it down from the Summit and it had not warmed up a bit on the way down. We took some photos of us frolicking on the beach (62) and I even got into it! (63) But as far as getting into that water, "Forget it!" As I was explaining we had some medicinal beverage that we applied to the coffee, and Alice covered, snuggled down with a hot toddy. (64)

We had a nice evening meal and set up our tents for overnight. (65) It seemed that no matter where you set up those tents there was always a root or a rock digging into your ribs overnight. Other than that, it was pleasant. During the night a White Pass freight double locomotive was pulling the grade towards the summit with a full load of Anvil ore. The turbochargers on the locomotives were whistling so loudly with their load that in my sleep it sounded like a jet aircraft. I was trying to figure why a jet was flying so low in such a remote area, but finally realized what it was. The tracks were not very far over from us, so it was back to a good sleep for the rest of the night.

Up early, and today is a brand new day. After breakfast we were packing up and on (photo 65) looking beyond the tents was the trail. We heard a work car coming on the railway, clickety-click and looked up to see it go by as we were right near the railway. What we saw was a bear that thought the work car was after him and was running down the trail. Likely what happened was that he smelled the bacon and eggs we had fried that morning and was coming to investigate. The kids were so busy they didn't see the bear at all, but Alice and I saw it cross the opening and going down the trail towards the Chilkoot. We did not say a word, but I quietly got out my flare gun should he decide to come back. Guess he ran down the trail until the trail swung away from the tracks and he could get his wind back!

We completed packing and hit the trail ourselves, and only when we were well along did we say anything about the bear. On the way we go through Bare Loon Lake with a pleasant stopping area. You may encounter anything on the trail, and sure enough we came across the Hangin' Tree. (66) High in the tree is a skeleton and you have to watch your step or you might replace that bunch of bones. Good to see that at least someone has a sense of humour.

So off we go into Bennett (67), which is just a short jaunt, have lunch and catch the train for Whitehorse. You come to a nice view of Bennett Lake (68) and just before the railway station you come to the old church. It is amazing that these people had enough faith to build a whole

church in their space of time there. (69) When the lake opened, they were away to the gold fields and the church was left behind for folks to marvel at even decades later. It is quite amazing the way it has stood up for the many decades, and to assure that it stayed that way props were placed against the walls. As I understand, that when we were in Whitehorse there was a marriage ceremony performed in the church. Next to it is a plaque explaining the old church. (70) And the old snow blower of the White Pass. (71)

Arriving at Bennett railway station, (72) the first thing was to get rid of a few days of beard. The first year I used the washroom to shed about 5 days of beard, but as far as getting a cup of decent coffee, forget it. We had to wait for the 12-noon train. But the second year was entirely different, for I went in and took off the beard and washed, and a young lady asked me if I would like a cup of coffee. I near fell off my chair in accepting that offer. That noon there were 28 hikers off the Chilkoot, and the young ladies manning the station were near run off their feet to service both southbound and northbound trains at noon. They asked if we could help setting up and you never saw a place set up so briskly. Some of us had plates, some saucers, others cups and others with silverware. It was a lot of fun and the young ladies could coast a bit before being inundated with tourists for the noon meal. Nothing was too good for us, and instead of being placed in one of the two tourist dining rooms we were placed in the Engineer's dining room. (Likely a wise move as all of us would smell sweaty after coming off the trail.) We fit in there very nicely, and our engineer back to Whitehorse was a friend of mine. So from Bennett to Carcross Roy and I rode in the engine with the engineer. Always on the way back we noticed that the hikers were given a car all of their own. It could be that after four or five days on the trail and sweating that we didn't smell that sweet? Couldn't smell it ourselves, but I guess we all smelled the same way likely. Nothing that a good bath would not cure! We got back into Whitehorse and to the old rut, saying, "Yes, we'll have to go back again." But somehow among other things we never made it, but have fond memories of our days spent on the Chilkoot Trail.