



It starts up at the top of the Alaskan panhandle and runs south along the coast of Alaska and the Canadian province of British Columbia. It covers a thousand miles and ends just below the U.S. border in Seattle, Washington. It's called, the Inside Passage.

And that is precisely what it is: a sea passage that runs along the northwest coast. But it runs between the coast and a series of islands that protect the route from the open sea. At its southernmost point, the course is shielded for three hundred miles by Vancouver Island. Then



the Queen Charlotte Islands take over the defense. And finally the route is safeguarded by the more than one thousand islands that make up the Alexander Archipelago. It is a magnificent stretch of wilderness.

I started my journey from the Canadian city of Vancouver.

Archeologists believe that native tribes have been living in the Glacier Bay area for at least 10,000 years. The first Europeans to explore the territory were the Russians, who sailed through during the 1740s. About fifty years later the French stopped in to check things out. By the 1880s, tour boats were coming in to take a look. Glacier Bay is truly one of the most fascinating places in Alaska.

THE WINDY PLACE

This morning's port of call is the town of Skagway. The name *Skagway* comes from a native American word meaning the windy place. It's located at the

northernmost point on the Inside Passage. The area was never a permanent settlement for any of the tribes, but it had been used for hundreds of years as a seasonal ground for hunting and fishing.

The first European to take a serious interest in Skagway was a retired steamboat captain by the name of William Moore. In 1887, he staked a claim for 160 acres of land and with the help of his son he built a small cabin. He knew the area so well that the Canadian government asked him to help their surveyors find a pass through the mountains. He did and it eventually became known as The White Pass. Moore had been watching all of the mining activity going around in the territory and he firmly believed that it was just a question of time before there was a major gold strike. He also believed that when that strike came, Skagway would become the seaport for the gold rush.

And boy, was he right! When word of the Bonanza Creek gold strike got out, over 100,000 people set out to seek their fortune in the Yukon, and the route they took to get there started with a ship to Skagway. In the end, only about 30,000 people got here but they turned the place into the classic gold



rush boomtown. In 1898 Skagway had almost one hundred saloons filled with gamblers, thieves and ah, ladies of perpetual availability.

These days Skagway has about 800 permanent residents, and a great nostalgia about its past. Much of the original commercial district has managed to survive and the United States Park Service conducts guided walking tours through the historic areas of the town. My guide today is Rick Fields.

RICK FIELDS
U.S. PARK SERVICE
The Red Onion
Saloon was a
saloon and bordello
during the time of
the Gold Rush.
Downstairs the
saloon, upstairs the



ladies of the evening. During the time of the Gold Rush, if a gentleman wanted any kind of woman's accompaniment, he could walk into that saloon and behind the bar was a display case with dolls dressed like the ladies that were working the floor that evening. If a gentleman had any particular lady in mind, he could look behind the bar and if the doll was standing then she was available for your accompaniment. If she was lying down, she was busy.

The AB Hall was also an original structure. It was a fraternal organization that was developed by the stamperders as a kind of social club. There are over 10,000 pieces of driftwood nailed onto the face of that building. The last known member to ever join the Arctic Brotherhood here in Skagway was Warren G. Harding, our president. In 1923 he came to visit us for three short hours. We then initiated him into our Arctic Brotherhood Lodge.

Today the Lodge is our City Museum. We have a Fine Arts Museum with some of the old paraphernalia you might have found during the time of the Gold Rush. It's set up as a display so that you can go in and spend a few minutes and enjoy.

The Mascot Saloon has been set up as a display only by our National Parks Service. It's the kind of saloon you'd see during the turn of the century here in Skagway; it's got the old hardwood floors and the lighting as it was back in 1898. They even have some of the old cigars you would have found if you would have come here in 1898. We've restored all of these buildings along this block to their original condition: wallpaper, paint, colors, everything. It's really a pleasure to be in a community that had such community pride of their buildings. I really do enjoy living here.

Herman Kirmse was one of the very first pioneers that came into Skagway when the words of the Klondike Gold Rush happened throughout the country. Instead of

traveling over the pass and heading for the gold 600 miles away from here, Herman stopped here and established his jewelry business, Kirmse's Curios. He was quite an entrepreneur, like many that had to travel the trail up here.

It seems that it wasn't the prospectors. The guy who really made a good living up here was the packer, the storekeeper, the guy who sold you services.

When the prospectors headed out of Skagway they had to choose between two routes to the gold. One was the Chilkoot Trail. That's what it looked like during 1897 and '98 when some 30,000 prospectors made the six-hour climb up what came to be known as the "Golden Stairs." And because each of them was transporting a minimum of 1,000 pounds of supplies, they made that trip at least twenty times.

The other Skagway trail used by the gold seekers to get to a claim was the White Pass. It was less steep than the Chilkoot but no less dangerous.

ALL ABOARD

In 1900, things got a lot easier. That was the year that the White Pass and Yukon Railroad opened and connected Skagway to the town of Frazer



in the Canadian Yukon. The rails run through some of the most rugged terrain in North America.

The roadbeds were carved along sheer rock cliffs. Tunnels were hammered through solid granite. When it was completed, it was considered to be one of the engineering marvels of its time. Today it's a marvelous guided tour for visitors to Skagway -- and the guide is Sharon Hannon.

SHARON HANNON

The Denver Glacier Bridge is mile-post 5.8 on your railmaps. We're going to be crossing over the east fork of the Skagway River. As we make a real sharp left curve over the bridge, you'll have a nice opportunity to view the train -- all fifteen parlor cars that we're pulling. So it's just amazing to think that this railroad that we're traveling on this morning is nearly one hundred years

old. And how they built it back then is absolutely incredible. These workers were roped together while hanging on the slopes. And the smooth granite obviously offered no footholds whatsoever. So in hazardous winter weather, these men chipped all of this



granite with hand tools in order to plant the 450 tons of blasting powder. This was obviously extremely hard, very dangerous work, for thirty cents an hour. And they say that this

was a railroad that was impossible to build. There is very little advanced planning involved. Now there was no rolling stock, there was no construction materials or heavy-duty equipment. There was no means of feeding or housing the work crews, and remember, a total of 35,000 men worked on the line. Also, the site was more than a thousand miles from the closest supply base which was in Seattle, Washington. So the railroad had to compete for ship cargo space with the thousands of stampeders that were also headed up north. And I mentioned earlier, the workforce were highly educated professional men, but by no means skilled railroad laborers. So this railroad was built against all odds and it was completed in only two years, two months, and one day -- all built by hand. And it cost ten million dollars to build it, and then another two million dollars to outfit it for service. And it's an international railroad. It was financed by the British, contracted by the Canadians, and engineered by the Americans.

The White Pass and Yukon Railroad certainly made the trip from Alaska to the Yukon easier. What you're looking at is the



last remaining section of the original pass that the prospectors used. Can you imagine hiking thirty-five miles, carrying hundreds of pounds of gear on your

back on a path that narrow? And by the time the railroad was finished the gold rush was over.

About an hour boat ride south of Skagway is the town of Haines. It started out as a settlement for the Native Alaskan Tlingit tribe, and they still play a very active role in the community.

A non-profit association called Alaska Indian Arts has dedicated itself to the revival and perpetuation of native craft and culture and in Haines they present the Chilkat Dancers, a group whose authentic performances have given them a worldwide reputation.

The Haines area has always been important to the native tribes. It was the end point for the ancient trail into the interior, and it was also the site of the gathering of the eagles. Today the region covers 48,000 acres and is known as the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve. Each year some 4,000 bald eagles take up residence along a five-mile stretch of the Chilkat River. They're attracted to the spot by an annual late run of spawning

salmon. In addition, warm water upwellings in the river bottom keep parts of the river ice-free



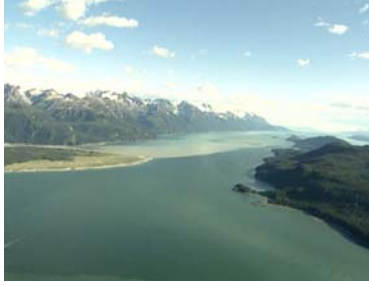
during the winter, providing even more fish for the eagles, at a time when many other food sources are exhausted. This is nature throwing an all-you-can-eat buffet for the eagle, and it's been going on for thousands of years.

But it almost came to an end in 1917 when someone in the government decided that the eagles were eating too many salmon and began to offer a bounty on them. Over a hundred and twenty thousand eagles were shot for a dollar or two dollars each before someone realized that in fact the eagles were not doing any damage at all. Just another episode in the endless saga of government stupidity.

Fortunately the eagle is now protected. It is a federal crime to harm or possess a bald eagle, and with any luck, the law is being enforced. And if you've ever wanted to see Alaska from an eagle's eye view, take a look at this.

LARGEST STATE IN AMERICA

Fragments of the earth's crust drifted together to form Alaska. And they are still very much in the process of



drifting and forming. And what they have formed is already the largest state in the United States of America. It's twice as large as Texas and has fifty percent more coastline than all the states in the lower 48 put together.

The Spanish were probably the first Europeans to explore this coast, but the Russians were the first to try and take control. The Russians showed up in 1741. Actually, it wasn't really a Russian. It was a Dane named Vitus Bering who worked for the Russians, and eventually lent his name to the Bering Straits. When his crew got back to Russia, they showed everybody the sea otter pelts that they had acquired -- skins that were immediately judged to be the finest fur that anyone in Russia had ever seen. That did it. The exploration and the exploitation of Alaska was underway.

The word Alaska comes from a native phrase that means "the object towards which the actions of the sea are directed." But it wasn't only the Russians who were directing their actions towards Alaska. The British were beginning to nose around. Captain James Cook came through in 1778 and picked up a few otter skins of his own. And to make matters even worse, the Spanish were thinking about coming back. They'd been down in Los Angeles, and when they realized that the movie business wasn't going to begin for another hundred years, they started moving up along the coast to see what was happening here.

Sure, Alaska was beautiful, and the sea otters made a great fashion statement, but by the 1860s Russia wanted out. Well, actually what they wanted was to *sell* out before somebody just took Alaska away from them without making a payment.

A Russian agent went to see William Seward, who was then the U.S. Secretary of State, and somehow convinced him that buying Alaska was the deal of a lifetime. And at 7.2 million dollars -- or 2 cents per

acre -- it was.

For hundreds of years, the Gastineau Channel along the southern coast of Alaska was a quiet fishing ground for the local Tlingit tribes. But all that changed in 1880 when a Sitka mining engineer offered a reward for any tribal chief who could bring him a piece of gold-bearing ore and show him where that ore came from. A Tlingit clan elder by the name of Kowee brought in the sought-after sample, and George sent a couple of prospectors down to check out the location. One of them kept a diary that has the following entry: "We knew it was gold, but we were surprised to see so much of it, and not in particles -- in large streaks running through the rock and in lumps as large as peas and beans." I like these guys. Not only did they know about gold, they were into good eating.

Their names were Richard Harris and Joe Juneau. They staked a 160-acre townsite and the gold rush was on. Originally the town was called Harrisburg, apparently because Harris could read and write and Juneau couldn't, so Harris did the recording of the claim. Eventually, however, Juneau got his name back.

Unlike many gold rush towns, Juneau survived and even prospered after the gold rush was over. Today it is



the state capitol of Alaska, and home to about 30,000 residents. Juneau is on the small side in terms of the number of people who live here, but in terms of area it is actually the largest town in North America and second largest in the world. It covers 3,108 square miles. The city clings to the base of two mountains that top out at over 3,500 feet above sea level and literally lock Juneau into its waterfront cove.

As a tourist there are a number of things of interest in Juneau.

ON ICE

Behind the mountains that form Juneau's backdrop is the Juneau Icefield, over 1,500 square miles of ice cap, and the source of thirty-eight glaciers,

Alaska

including the Mendenhall. Mendenhall Glacier is just thirteen miles outside of Juneau and it is one of the few drive-in, walk-up glaciers in the world.

The Mendenhall in Mendenhall Glacier was Thomas C. Mendenhall, the Superintendent of the U.S. Coastal and Geodetic Survey at the time that the border was surveyed between Canada and the United States.

As moisture-filled air comes in from the Pacific Ocean, it runs into the peaks of the coastal mountains. The encounter causes the air to give up its water vapor and it does so in the

form of snow... over one hundred feet of it each year. Because the air is so cold up here, the snow never melts. It just gets heavier and heavier, and packs together so tightly that the air between the molecules is lost. In the process, it transforms itself into glacial ice. Under this extraordinary pressure, the ice begins to flow. The Mendenhall Glacier flows down the Mendenhall Valley for twelve miles at the rate of two feet per day. But it never gets anywhere, because at the same time that it is flowing, it is also melting. Each day, large chunks of ice break away from the glacier and float off into the lake at its base. The process is known as "calving." In addition, glacial ice just melts away at the front edge. When the rate of Mendenhall's flow is compared to the rate of its melting, you end up with an annual withdrawal of about thirty feet. And it's been withdrawing since the 1700s.

The easiest access to a spectacular view of the area is from the Mt. Roberts Tramway. Its base is right in front of the dock where the cruise ships tie up, and its top is 1,750 feet above, overlooking Juneau and the Gastineau Channel.



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